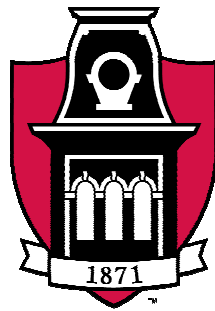


# Literary Study in Grades 9, 10, and 11 in Arkansas

SANDRA STOTSKY  
CHRISTIAN GOERING  
DAVID JOLLIFFE



UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS

University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
Department of Education Reform  
For information, contact [sstotsky@uark.edu](mailto:ssotsky@uark.edu)

Report posted at: [http://coehp.uark.edu/literary\\_study.pdf](http://coehp.uark.edu/literary_study.pdf)

This report represents the views of the authors, not necessarily the views of the University of Arkansas.

## Preface

Like so many research projects, this one started with a spirited conversation about what the three of us wished we knew more about. “Does anyone know what high school students are being asked to read today?” Have the testing and accountability policies of the last decade had an impact on the teaching of literature? Has a “read anything at all just for the sake of reading” paradigm trumped the teaching of authentic literature in Arkansas classrooms—and a real English curriculum?

From these questions came this research project: a survey of over 400 English teachers in grades 9, 10, and 11 in Arkansas public schools to find out what they assign, and follow-up interviews with some of these teachers in focus group meetings across the state's four Congressional districts to find out more about the conditions for teaching in the context of testing and accountability. We made trips to Farmington, Walnut Ridge, Pine Bluff, Helena, Arkadelphia, Little Rock, Harrison, and Beebe, and we are pleased to be able to feature the voices of Arkansas's English teachers on the topic of literary study in our report.

We were fortunate to be able to draw on the research budgets attached to the endowed chairs of two of us for the costs for the survey and the focus group meetings. We are grateful to the donors supporting Sandra Stotsky's 21st Century Chair in Teacher Quality in the Department of Education Reform, and to the Brown Family Foundation, which supports David Jolliffe's Brown Chair in English Literacy, with matching funds from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation. We are also grateful to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, which supported Chris Goering's time and work on this project.

During the 18 months it took to complete and write this report, we felt blessed to be able to rely on Joan Traffas as our research assistant. Joan took charge of the literature review, wrote up the minutes for all our own meetings, scheduled the focus group meetings, and patiently transcribed the tapes of what the teachers said at these meetings. Her careful work was indispensable to the completion of this study. We must also note how satisfied we were with the quality of the work done by the Survey Center at the University of New Hampshire, which handled data collection and synthesis for us. Tracy Fowler's patience in answering our many questions about numbers and their interpretation deserves a prize of its own.

At the time we were working on the survey of high school English teachers in Arkansas, the senior author of this study was conducting a similar survey at the national level, sponsored by the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics and funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. We cannot say we are overjoyed that our gloomy findings from the Arkansas survey parallel the trends found at the national level, but the national study confirms the validity of our findings in Arkansas.

We hope that educators and policy makers throughout Arkansas—at the Department of Education, at all of our institutions of higher education, and in our state legislature—will find our findings and recommendations useful. The major goal for our study was to find out how to help Arkansas to improve student achievement in reading (and writing) so that many more students in K-12 can benefit from their high school programs and the post-secondary programs in which they enroll.

Sandra Stotsky  
Christian Goering  
David Jolliffe

## Executive Summary

According to state assessments and other indices of reading achievement, the reading skills of Arkansas high school students and of American students generally have shown little or no improvement in several decades despite regular and huge increases in funds for elementary and secondary education by both the federal and state government. Although many factors influence the development of students' reading skills, one cause of the plateau in Arkansas and nationally may be the absence of a coherent, progressively challenging literature curriculum in the secondary grades. Another cause may be the contradictory nature of the chief pedagogical strategies for literary study used by secondary English teachers.

The purpose of this study was to find out what major works English teachers in grades 9, 10, and 11 in Arkansas public schools assign their students in standard and honors courses and what approaches they use for teaching students how to read literary texts, both imaginative literature and literary non-fiction. We excluded Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and other advanced courses, all electives, as well as basic or remedial classes. Our interest was in the middle third of Arkansas students. We surveyed over 400 Arkansas teachers (of a total of about 1400 in the state) and held two focus group meetings in each of the four Congressional districts in the state in the fall of 2009 to understand better their responses to the survey. Two major findings emerged from an analysis of their responses to the survey and their comments at the focus group meetings.

First, we found that much has changed in the content of the high school literature curriculum for students in standard or honors courses. The most frequently mentioned titles (usually described as the "classics") are assigned in only a small percentage of courses and, overall, the texts they assign do not increase in difficulty over the grades. Second, we found non-analytical approaches dominating teachers' pedagogy in standard and honors courses for all of literary study (literary non-fiction as well as imaginative literature), in tandem with a compulsory focus on culture-free skills, imposed by state standards, state assessments, and the intervention programs teachers are told to use for all students in their classes, whether or not they are below grade level in reading. As the teachers at the focus group meetings told us, only students in Pre-AP and AP classes are likely to engage regularly in close reading of a text, fiction or non-fiction.

That the fostering of analytical reading skills is in effect confined to the top third of Arkansas's students in only these courses may be a good part of the explanation for the high remediation rate in post-secondary education in Arkansas and the high failure rate on the AP tests themselves. Our findings serve as the basis for recommendations in four areas: K-12 curriculum policies, staffing policies, undergraduate and teacher preparation programs for prospective English teachers, and state assessments and standards in the English language arts.

- The Arkansas Department of Education needs to develop the framework for an appropriately challenging English language arts curriculum for students in grades 7-12 in the middle third of academic performance.
- The Arkansas Department of Education should develop and provide guidelines for stronger literature and reading programs in grades K-8, with a special stress on vocabulary development.
- The governor of Arkansas and the commissioner of education in Arkansas should appoint a committee of Arkansas residents and educators to designate five culturally and historically significant novels or plays, as well as a body of culturally and historically significant poetry and literary non-fiction, reflecting different but recognized periods in our nation's civic and literary

heritage, to be taught to all public high school students in the state over a five-year period, at the end of which a new committee will be appointed to make a similar recommendation for the next five-year period.

- The Arkansas Department of Education needs to require positive evidence from *independent research* (research that has *not been commissioned or conducted* by the vendor) before endorsing any intervention programs and related professional development for teachers designed to improve the reading and writing skills of low-performing students.
- High school English teachers should have a maximum student load of 80 students per day (NCTE, 1999) and no more than five periods of teaching per day.
- The Arkansas Department of Education should prioritize professional development for all English teachers in rhetorical theory and analysis and in how to do and teach close reading using historically and culturally significant texts.
- The Arkansas Department of Higher Education should direct Departments of English at any university at which students can become licensed to teach English to take explicit notice of their undergraduate majors who propose to become secondary English teachers and make specific efforts to teach these majors how to read texts closely and analytically.
- The Arkansas Department of Higher Education should direct English education programs in the state to emphasize in their methods courses how to do and teach close reading.
- The Arkansas Department of Education should use reading passages, writing prompts, and types of questions on state assessments in grade 10 that provide models for high school English teachers, such as those in ACT's Reading, English, and Writing subtests or in British Columbia's high school exit test.
- The state's high school standards should include culture-rich and culture-specific reading and literature standards, and the state should request that such standards serve as guides to common assessments to be developed on the basis of the final version of the Common Core State Standards Initiative standards it may adopt in 2010.

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## I. Background

### A. The National Picture: Evidence for a Decline

According to the latest assessment of adult literacy in this country, titled the *National Assessment of Adult Literacy* (NAAL) and released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the reading skills of American adults have declined dramatically from 1992 to 2003 (NCES, 2005). In fact, the higher the educational level, the bigger the decline in their ability to read ordinary prose, one of the three kinds of literacy assessed by NCES. High school graduates declined 6 points on average, college graduates 11 points, and those with graduate study or graduate degrees 13 points. NCES wasn't trying to measure how well Americans can read *Great Expectations* or *Native Son*; if it had, the decline might have been even greater. To the contrary, the assessment sought to find out how well adults read basic instructions and can do such tasks as comparing viewpoints in two editorials and reading prescription labels.

Astonishingly, only 31 percent of those with *graduate study* or *graduate degrees* in 2003 were rated "proficient" in reading prose (i.e., they were able to go beyond a literal understanding of a complex book). In contrast, in a similar assessment in 1992, 41 percent were rated "proficient," the highest of the four possible ratings. In 2003, only 31 percent of *college graduates* could be rated "proficient," compared to 40 percent in 1992.

NCES did not determine whether these were recent college graduates or not. But, interestingly, those in the age ranges of 18-24 and 24-39 showed on average a decline in two of the three kinds of literacy: prose and document reading. In contrast, those in the two oldest age ranges, from age 50 up, showed *increases* at both the Intermediate and Proficient level in all three kinds of literacy.

Even more astonishing, no reporter saw fit to comment on the fact that the decline in literacy skills among college graduates and those with graduate study or degrees rated "proficient" was confined to males. The percentage of highly educated males rated "proficient" in all three kinds of literacy assessed (prose reading, document reading, and quantitative reasoning, as defined by NCES) declined. In contrast, the percentage of highly educated females rated "proficient" in the first two kinds of literacy remained the same, and in the third kind increased somewhat. The NCES study doesn't show the differences in scores between men and women in age ranges, so we do not know whether or to what extent males in older age ranges showed increases.

Results on the main test of grade 12 reading achievement by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2002 suggest that a decline is occurring among both males and females before they graduate from high school but that the decline in reading skills is far more a young male than a young female phenomenon. From 1992 (when this series of tests began) to 2002, high school senior girls lost two points in reading scores, while senior boys lost six points, leaving an enormous 16-point differential in their average scores. Results on the 2005 grade 12 test, released in February 2007, show both groups continuing to decline. Although there was a slight decrease in the gap, there was over one grade level difference between girls and boys, with girls outscoring boys by 13 points.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, NAEP's long-term trend tests in reading have consistently shown a gender gap since their inception over 30 years ago, but this gap has increased by only two points over the 30-year period, leading to a 14-point differential among 17-year old in 2004.

Trend data are available for almost the identical period of time from one other source: a 2004 report by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Titled *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, the NEA report found major declines in voluntary literary reading

for both men and women between 1992 and 2002 (NEA, 2004; Bauerlein & Stotsky, 2005). But, men and women declined at different rates, considerably widening the gender gap in voluntary literary reading by young adults. While book reading by 18- to 24-year-old women slipped from 63 percent to 59 percent, book reading by 18- to 24-year-old men plummeted from 55 percent to 43 percent, triple the decline for women.

None of the education experts who were interviewed by reporters about the results of the NAAL commented on the gender gap. Nor did commentators in the media at the time the NEA report was released satisfactorily address the decline and growing gender gap in young adult voluntary literary reading or in high school reading skills, the other two independent sources of trend data. Some of these experts may not have been able to offer an explanation for the trends in these three sources of trend data because they do not know what has been taking place in the school curriculum—in the early grades where children are taught how to read and a desire to read is supposed to be inculcated, and in the upper grades where one might expect extensive reading to be assigned and advanced reading skills taught.

We have an empirical glimpse at what large numbers of American secondary students are currently reading from a non-academic source of information. The content of what seemingly college-bound students choose to read raises many questions about the quality of the reading curriculum in our schools. According to a 2009 report by Renaissance Learning, the company that produces Accelerated Reader (a computerized database for keeping track of what K-12 students read), the Harry Potter series and other contemporary young adult fantasy series (by Stephenie Meyer in particular) are among the most widely read books by secondary school students. As Table 1 shows, ten of the top 16 most frequently read books by *grades 9-12 students in the top 10 percent of reading achievement* in the 2008-2009 academic year were contemporary young adult fantasies—almost all with middle school reading levels (as judged by a readability formula developed by Renaissance Learning). The database does not indicate whether the books students read were assigned or self-selected (e.g., for book reports), but it is easy to guess which ones were assigned by English teachers. Such titles as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Night*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Kite Runner* were likely assigned by English teachers.

A striking feature of most of these top 40 titles is their readability level. The formula developed and used by Renaissance Learning to estimate reading difficulty is based on a measure of vocabulary load and a measure of sentence complexity and is adjusted for word count. Most titles are at a middle school readability level, whether assigned or self-selected. Extremely few are at the high school level of difficulty with respect to vocabulary and sentence structure (e.g., *The Scarlet Letter*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Frankenstein*). There are few nonfiction titles; the few that are mentioned are autobiographical in genre. Moreover, if one can generalize from the "Read Count," which indicates how many students read the book in grades 9-12 in the 2008-2009 academic year, these counts imply that students going on to college from an American high school have had few common reading experiences aside from a large number of relatively easy-to-read contemporary young adult fantasies, and that their tastes for mature fiction and nonfiction have clearly not been developed.

It is not surprising that, in an attempt to upgrade high school students' reading and writing skills and to introduce more academic rigor in high school coursework, many states and school districts across the country have begun to encourage if not mandate more Advanced Placement course-offerings, including the two AP English courses—one on Literature and Composition and the other on Language and Composition. The number of students now taking these two AP courses has significantly increased over the past decade (see Table 2). For example, the number of grade

**Table 1: Top 40 Titles, their Readability Level, and Read Count for 1500 Boys and Girls in Grades 9-12 in the Top 10% of Reading Achievement in the 2009 Accelerated Reader Database**

-	Grade	Read Count	Listing
1	9-12	332	Twilight, Stephenie Meyer (4.9, UG)
2	9-12	325	Breaking Dawn, Stephenie Meyer (4.8, UG)
3	9-12	253	New Moon, Stephenie Meyer (4.7, UG)
4	9-12	228	Eclipse, Stephenie Meyer (4.5, UG)
5	9-12	206	Brisingr, Christopher Paolini (7.8, UG)
6	9-12	116	To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee (5.6, UG)
7	9-12	102	Night, Elie Wiesel (4.8, UG)
8	9-12	99	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, J.K. Rowling (6.9, MG)
9	9-12	85	Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck (4.5, UG)
10	9-12	75	Eldest, Christopher Paolini (7, UG)
11	9-12	75	The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald (7.3, UG)
12	9-12	74	The Host, Stephenie Meyer (4.5, UG)
13	9-12	74	Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury (5.2, UG)
14	9-12	68	Eragon, Christopher Paolini (5.6, UG)
15	9-12	62	The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini (5.2, UG)
16	9-12	62	Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, J.K. Rowling (7.2, MG)
17	9-12	61	Animal Farm, George Orwell (7.3, UG)
18	9-12	59	1984, George Orwell (8.9, UG)
19	9-12	58	The Crucible, Arthur Miller (4.9, UG)
20	9-12	52	Lord of the Flies, William Golding (5, UG)
21	9-12	52	Frankenstein, Mary Shelley (12.4, UG)
22	9-12	49	The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger (4.7, UG)
23	9-12	44	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, J.K. Rowling (6.8, MG)
24	9-12	43	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, J.K. Rowling (6.7, MG)
25	9-12	42	The Giver, Lois Lowry (5.7, MG)
26	9-12	42	Ender's Game, Orson Scott Card (5.5, UG)
27	9-12	41	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, J.K. Rowling (7.2, MG)
28	9-12	41	A Separate Peace, John Knowles (6.9, UG)
29	9-12	40	Pretties, Scott Westerfeld (5.7, MG)
30	9-12	40	The Book Thief, Markus Zusak (5.1, UG)
31	9-12	40	The Scarlet Letter (Unabridged), Nathaniel Hawthorne (11.7, UG)
32	9-12	39	The Hobbit, J.R.R. Tolkien (6.6, UG)
33	9-12	37	The Lightning Thief, Rick Riordan (4.7, MG)
34	9-12	37	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, J.K. Rowling (5.5, MG)
35	9-12	37	The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Unabridged), Mark Twain (6.6, MG)
36	9-12	36	Pride and Prejudice (Unabridged), Jane Austen (12, UG)
37	9-12	33	Angels & Demons, Dan Brown (5.6, UG)
38	9-12	33	Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare (8.6, UG)
39	9-12	33	Uglies, Scott Westerfeld (5.2, MG)
40	9-12	32	The Sea of Monsters, Rick Riordan (4.6, MG)

12 students taking the AP English Literature and Composition test rose from about 145,500 in 1997 to over 320,000 in 2008.<sup>2</sup> We do not know if this has led to improved reading and writing skills at the college level; remediation rates at post-secondary institutions have not declined nationally.

In order to improve student performance in AP courses and to prepare them for college-level work better than their current curricula do, the College Board (CB) has developed several programs outlining English language arts curricula for middle and high school. But, so far as we can tell, these programs address only skills and do not outline a substantive base for a curriculum. CB's efforts are important to note because among the federal government's new education priorities is an initiative whose goal is to increase by 50 percent the number of U.S. high school students participating in AP or college-level classes by 2016.

**Table 2: Total Number of Examinations in the Two AP English Courses, 1998-2008**

AP EXAMINATION VOLUME CHANGES (1998-2008)											
SUBJECT	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
English (Total)	247,210	273,591	304,692	336,716	371,506	405,227	438,007	491,667	537,833	580,708	626,837
English Lang/Comp	80,016	97,370	114,049	135,428	156,193	175,860	198,514	230,709	256,722	282,230	306,479
English Lit/Comp	167,194	176,221	190,643	201,288	215,313	229,367	239,493	260,958	281,111	298,478	320,358

Source: The College Board

## B. In Arkansas: Evidence of a Need to Increase Reading Achievement

### 1. State Policy

Arkansas has sought to increase the number of students going on to post-secondary education and their academic competence in two ways. In 2006, the state board of education increased course requirements for a high school diploma (called the Smart Core Curriculum) in order to strengthen all students' academic background for post-secondary education.<sup>3</sup> These requirements take effect beginning with the graduating class of 2010 (although there is a provision allowing parents to waive their child's participation in the Smart Core Curriculum).

Earlier, in 2003, Arkansas mandated the teaching of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in its high schools. Act 102 of 2003 requires that all high school students have the opportunity to enroll in at least one AP course in each of the four core areas—English, mathematics, science and social studies—beginning with the 2008-2009 school year. Later legislation required the availability of AP courses through distance learning and payment of all AP test-taking fees by the state. Other acts have provided funding for professional development for AP and pre-AP teachers. Superintendents must verify to the Commissioner of Education that their district offers the required minimum of AP courses and report annually to the State Board of Education on the number of students in AP courses and their scores by grade level, economic status, and ethnicity.

A major reason for these two policies was not only to increase the number of students in all demographic groups at the state's post-secondary institutions but also to decrease the number of students requiring remedial coursework in English, reading, and mathematics as college freshmen and to accelerate completion of an undergraduate degree program as well as increase graduation rates. A large number of students drop out or take six years or more to complete a degree program.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Reading Achievement

It is too early to tell how successful these two policies will be, but scores on various reading tests given to Arkansas students show their need—and perhaps the need for other policies as well. Results on recent NAEP tests for high school seniors in Arkansas show a decline in reading performance for all but the top students. Except for those at the 90th percentile, declines occurred across most of the performance distribution in 2005 as compared with 1992. The percentage of students performing at or above the Proficient level decreased from 40 to 35 percent.

Arkansas's average score on NAEP's grade 8 reading test and its relationship to the national public school average have been virtually unchanged over the past decade. In 1998, Arkansas had an average scaled score of 256 in contrast to the national public school average of 261. In 2007, it had an average scaled score of 258 in contrast to the national public school average of 261. The percentage of grade 8 students performing at the Proficient and Advanced levels shows only slight improvement. In 1998, 23 percent were Proficient and 1 percent Advanced. In 2007, 25 percent were Proficient and 1 percent Advanced. The trends were similar on NAEP's grade 4 reading test. In 1992, 23 percent were Proficient and 4 percent Advanced. In 2007, 29 percent were Proficient and 5 percent Advanced.

On the state's own literacy tests in grade 11, the trend line has moved upward from 2001 to 2009, from 22 percent in 2001 to 57 percent in 2009 for the percentage of students deemed Proficient or Advanced (Table 3). However, in 2009, the state lowered the cut score a bit for the grade 11 literacy exam, although it is unclear how that may have affected the increase in percentages for Proficient in 2009. And, only 1 percent are still deemed Advanced. The curriculum and/or pedagogy used in earlier grades may be part of the problem. Results for grades 3–9 on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Table 4) show a decline from 2005 to 2007.

There is a mixture of good and bad news with respect to AP course-taking. Although the number of Arkansas students taking AP courses is rising rapidly, the percentage with a score of 3, 4, or 5 is not high. According to the 2008 CB report, 4716 students took the AP English Literature and Composition Test (most of whom were in grade 12), but only 1491 received scores of 3, 4, or 5 (see Table 5). Moreover, a large majority of test-takers (3004, or 64 percent) and of those who scored 3, 4, or 5 (973) were girls. Conversely, boys (1712) comprised only 36 percent of test-takers, and only 554 boys earned a score of 3, 4, or 5. Thus, less than one-third of Arkansas students who took this test in 2008 passed, and boys were a distinct minority of those taking the test and of those getting 3, 4, or 5.

**Table 3: Arkansas Grade 11 Literacy Test Scores, 2001-2009**

Year	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced	Proficient/Advanced
2009	9%	35%	55%	1%	57%
2008	9%	40%	50%	1%	51%
2007	12%	37%	49%	1%	51%
2006	11%	44%	45%	0%	45%
2005	14%	40%	44%	1%	45%
2004	15%	40%	43%	2%	45%
2003	18%	40%	39%	2%	41%
2002	22%	41%	36%	1%	37%
2001	31%	47%	21%	1%	22%

Source: Arkansas Department of Education

**Table 4: Arkansas Scores in Reading on the ITBS, Grades 3 to 9, 2005-2007**

Year	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2007	58	59	58	48	51	49	46
2006	61	60	57	49	49	49	47
2005	62	62	59	54	52	53	52

Source: Arkansas Department of Education

From a different perspective, however, these results are good news; just a few years ago, many fewer students even took the test; in 2003, 1319 students took this test, in 2004, 1622 did, and in 2005, 3443 did. Thus, more students received a score of 3, 4, or 5 in 2008 than took the test in 2003. However, the gender gap remains as large as it was years ago. In 2002, of the 1265 students who took the AP English Literature and Composition test, 781, or 62 percent were girls, and 484, or 38 percent, were boys.

It is not clear why so many students got 1s and 2s in 2008; no conjectures have been offered publicly by Arkansas officials or CB. Although syllabi for the AP English Literature and Composition course vary across teachers and schools, the outline for a syllabus must be approved by CB, and students are typically expected to read at least several novels or other long works. It does not appear that the low pass rates are related to excessively demanding content in this AP course. It may not be irrelevant that class grades for seniors need to be determined before the results of the AP tests are known and students' records are weighted for taking the AP course, regardless of class grade or test score.

Although recent trends in the results of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in Reading suggest that part of the problem may be weaknesses in the curriculum and/or the pedagogy used in earlier grades, it is not clear what is being done in grades 3 to 10 to improve student ability to pass the grade 11 literacy test at an Advanced level, never mind the AP English courses in grade 11 or 12 (the AP Language and Composition Course and its test are typically taken in grade 11). Almost 27 percent of the students enrolled at Arkansas higher education institutions in Fall 2007 who took AP courses and graduated from high school in May 2007 were assigned to remediation (in contrast to almost 53 percent of their first-year college peers who had not taken AP courses in high school.<sup>5</sup> Although no data are available on the subject area of the AP courses taken or student pass rates, the 27 percent figure suggests that taking AP courses does not by itself preclude placement in a college remedial class (over 21 percent were assigned to remediation in mathematics).

Pre-AP courses, which began in Arkansas, are encouraged if not required, but no systematic information is available on the content, grade level, and number of Pre-AP English courses in the state. Nor do teachers of Pre-AP courses have to get their syllabi approved by CB.

With respect to teacher training, Arkansas requires all teachers of AP classes to take professional development offered by CB in order to be certified to teach an AP course. Those who teach Pre-AP English courses are encouraged to participate in this professional development. There is some information available on CB's website on its content. According to a regional director for CB,<sup>6</sup> these workshops often demonstrate the close reading of one or two specific works and include showing participants how to teach formal literary concepts using both general and specific pedagogical strategies. According to the ADE, in fiscal year 2008, Arkansas budgeted about \$1.8 million for Advanced Placement test fees, teacher training, and rewards to schools

**Table 5: Distribution of Scores of Arkansas Students by Sex on the AP English Literature and Composition Test, 2008**

	Females	Males	Total
Score of 5	45	23	68
Score of 4	270	133	403
Score of 3	622	398	1020
Score of 2	1281	649	1930
Score of 1	786	509	1295
Total	3004	1712	4716

Source: Arkansas Department of Education

Other indices of achievement in English or reading for the state show a decline or little change. Arkansas scores on the SAT test in Critical Reading, taken by less than 10 percent of Arkansas high school students, show that the class of 2009 in public schools had an average score of 569, compared to an average score of 575 in 2008, a decline of 6 points. On the other hand, Arkansas scores on the ACT English tests, taken by over 70 percent of Arkansas high school students, have not changed much from 2005 to 2009 and hover around the national average. In 2005, students' average English score was 20.5, compared with 20.6 in 2009. The state's ACT reading scores have increased slightly from 2005 to 2009 but remain below the national average. In 2005, their average reading score was 20.6, compared with 21.0 in 2009. Moreover, remediation rates for English and reading in post-secondary institutions in Arkansas are from one-fourth to one-third of all college freshmen, with little change from 1998 to 2008.<sup>7</sup> These high remediation rates clearly influence college graduation rates. The college graduation rate from four-year institutions within six years for the cohort of students from 2000 to 2006 was 44 percent. The college graduation rate from two-year institutions within three years for the cohort of students from 2003-2006 was 25 percent.

## II. Why this project?

*First, American students seem to graduate from high school with little literary knowledge and understanding.* And there is no reason to assume the situation is different in Arkansas. According to a 2008 assessment of a random sample of 1200 17-year olds given by Common Core, a new liberal arts-oriented organization advocating, among other things, a strong humanities education for high school students, only four of the eleven basic questions assessing students' knowledge of both contemporary and classic works were answered correctly by 60 percent of the respondents (Hess, 2008). Clearly, nothing has changed for the better since the results of a national survey of literature and history knowledge were reported in 1988 (Ravitch & Finn, 1988). Like Common Core's survey, their survey also focused on 11th grade students and strongly recommended a re-emphasis on history and literature in school curricula.

One reason for the paucity of literary knowledge in American students may be the amount of time spent in class on literary study in general. It is not clear how much time English teachers spend on literary study today in contrast to past decades because of the emphasis on teaching students how to read expository and functional texts. For example, the framework developed for the NAEP reading assessments (National Assessment Governing Board, 2008), to be given from 2009 on, stresses the reading of informational passages in grade 12; the recommended percentage of test passages for informational reading is 70 percent and for literary passages 30 percent (a percentage that includes passages on poetry, fiction, and literary non-fiction). The NAEP reading tests do not

assess drama because, it claims, the length of passage required is too long, even though Massachusetts regularly assesses passages from (often Shakespearean) plays on its grade 10 tests.

The NAEP percentages were not intended to guide the allotment of class time for the high school literature curriculum. The NAEP reading tests were intended by Congress to assess reading skills developed outside of school and in the other subjects taught in high school as well as the English class. Moreover, a report to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) by Achieve, which had urged the increase to 70 percent in the percentage of test passages for informational reading from the 60 percent figure in NAGB's 2004 pre-publication draft, noted very clearly that "literary text should remain the reading centerpiece of the English classroom," that the "NAEP reading assessment is not an 'English' test in the traditional sense," and that "if NAEP were an end-of-course English test, they would recommend a 50 percent or higher representation of literature" (Achieve, 2005, p. 21). Despite NAGB's own (mild) warnings about the limitations of the NAEP percentages for guiding the allotment of time for literary study in the high school curriculum,<sup>8</sup> some states or schools have used the NAEP percentages to revise their English language arts/reading (ELA) standards, curricula, and tests to conform to the time NAGB accorded literary study, i.e., to give more time to informational reading and less time to literary study (see, for example, Stotsky, 2005, pp. 95-96).

Unfortunately, despite NAGB's warning (and the clear statements in the report NAGB requested from Achieve), the project managed by the National Governors Association and the Council for Chief State School Officers to develop national standards in ELA and mathematics (CCSSI) has chosen to use NAGB's 70 percent figure for passage selection on the NAEP reading *assessments* to justify their own emphasis on the reading of informational texts in the high school English *curriculum*, to the detriment of reading fiction, poetry, and drama.<sup>9</sup> The purpose is, apparently, not only to alter English teachers' priorities in their own classes but also to ensure this emphasis in the national tests to be developed (based on the national standards that the U.S. Department of Education may require states to adopt as a condition of further Title I money under the No Child Left Behind Act) for which English teachers will be held accountable.

Other pressures may have also led schools and teachers to emphasize non-literary reading—e.g., the emphasis on "real-world" reading and writing and the limitations many teachers sense in the amount of outside reading of fiction many of their high school students will actually do.

But even if the time allotted to literary study is no less than in the past, a second reason for the paucity of literary knowledge in American students may be that students are not assigned texts of similar quality to those assigned in the past at the same grade levels. There are no recent national surveys of what English teachers assign secondary school students in their classes.

A third reason is that our public universities do not provide much if any guidance to high school English teachers about the knowledge of the English language and its literature incoming freshmen should have. For example, the University of California's current guidelines for high school course credit expect that entering students "have attained a body of knowledge that will provide breadth and perspective to new, more advanced studies." But the University of California does not spell out what that body of knowledge is with respect to the English language and its literature.

A fourth reason is that most state standards do not expect high school students to acquire much if any knowledge of the literary movements in the history of the literature written in English and of culturally and historically significant works and authors in the English language. A review of state standards for the English language arts (Stotsky, 2005) found that 25 states don't even



mention the existence of an “American” literature in their English standards. Ipso facto, they cannot—and do not—require their students to study our historically and culturally significant writers or their works, however they choose to define them. Instead, most states expect students to study “culturally relevant” texts (a term that is indefinable), and classical and contemporary works from all cultures—an impossibility for the typical English teacher if taken literally as a standard—and without any indication that they must all have literary quality or merit.

*Second, whether or not they are in AP English classes and are assigned high quality literary texts, American students do not seem to be receiving sufficient or adequate instruction in how to read difficult and complex works in high school.* After a survey of almost 36,000 middle school, high school, and post-secondary instructors of both regular and remedial courses across the curriculum (ACT, 2007a), American College Testing set forth in a short report (ACT, 2007b) the policies it recommends based on its interpretation of what these instructors indicated they saw as the major deficiency in their students—their inability to read complex texts. ACT stressed that students must be given “more opportunities to read challenging materials...so that they are better positioned to comprehend complex texts in all subjects once they enter college or the workplace.”

However, ACT did not suggest what these complex texts might be in grades 9-12, or what principles could be used to develop a coherent English curriculum ensuring that high school graduates would be exposed to a succession of increasingly more difficult and complex texts over the course of these four grades. What it assumed that students need in order to get ready for entry-level college coursework, and therefore recommended, in addition to “more opportunities to read challenging materials,” is more instruction in strategies for reading complex texts, starting in grade 9. Nonetheless, nothing in ACT's survey led logically to the conclusion that simply more instruction in reading comprehension strategies was the solution to the deficiencies noted by college-level instructors. ACT could just as easily have conjectured that inappropriate teaching methods in conjunction with the lack of a coherent and increasingly challenging literature and reading curriculum were contributing to students' deficiencies and that different teaching methods might be more successful in developing analytical reading skills. Indeed, that is what several English scholars imply.

Individual literary scholars agree that our students are not learning how to read more difficult or complex works, but they point to different reasons for students' limitations. According to Gerald Graff, professor of English and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, among the problems faced by those who teach literature at the college level are that their students do not know how the literary texts they are assigned to read matter in general, or how these texts might matter to them personally if they could in fact read them (Graff, 2003). Today's students do not enjoy literary analysis, Graff comments, and find the search for “hidden meanings” mystifying. Nor do they know how to write formal English. Graff accounts for the unmotivated, uncomprehending students overwhelming college English classrooms in the following way: They have not been taught how to summarize what they read and make arguments about it—the “name of the game in academe.” Graff does not try to explain why they have not been taught to do this, but Thomas Carnicelli does.

For many years Director of the English Teaching Major at the University of New Hampshire as well as a professor of English, Carnicelli sees incoming freshmen lacking in “traditional literacy” (Carnicelli, 2000, p. 311). In his view, the effort to get “reluctant or indifferent students to read literature” has led to a problem that is “just as bad: the widespread acceptance of a literary theory that can undermine the value of reading literature in the first place.” Carnicelli does not consider reader response, the literary theory he criticizes, as “a viable basis for teaching literature in a useful and responsible way.” (A reader response approach to literary study prioritizes the reader's

personal response to a text, shaped by family or cultural background and experience, as the basis for interpreting the text.) In Carnicelli's judgment:

It provides no clear standard of validity for either teachers or students. It gives the teacher no clear basis of authority: how is the teacher to direct a class discussion or grade a paper if all responses are equal?" Finally, it undermines the whole purpose of having students read literature in the first place: to learn new perspectives on human experience. How can students learn anything from literary texts if they do not pay careful attention to what the authors have to say (p. 226).

He also believes that students should be expected to analyze and interpret literary texts in writing as a significant part of the high school literature curriculum.

E.D. Hirsch, Jr., professor of English at the University of Virginia, sees the absence of a K-12 English language arts curriculum teaching all students common world knowledge as the major source of the gaps in achievement among demographic groups in this country (Hirsch, 2007) and of the generally low reading skills of most American students. Students cannot understand texts of increasing complexity and difficulty if they cannot bring some common academic and literary knowledge to their reading. In his view, the absence of such a curriculum can be accounted for by a pedagogical emphasis on process-oriented approaches (i.e., use of specific reading processes like setting a purpose, making inferences, and rereading what has been read) and on skills-driven approaches (i.e., using generic skills like finding a main idea and supporting details to understand a literary text, independent of its literary structure, literary history, and literary context). Such approaches work against the development of a coherent English curriculum because they are indifferent to the acquisition of both common academic knowledge and literary knowledge and to an understanding of a text's relationship to other texts that may have informed its content and shape. They thus prevent students from acquiring higher levels of reading comprehension.

### **III. Research Questions for this Study and Review of Related Research**

#### **A. Research Questions**

Our first question was what book-length works of fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction English teachers in Arkansas public schools assign in standard and honors courses (not Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses or advanced, elective, or remedial courses) in grades 9, 10, and 11, and how many major works per course. We were also interested in their level of reading difficulty. We wanted to explore whether the "broad middle" of Arkansas students are assigned progressively more difficult and more complex works to read from year to year so that their reading skills are developed for mature literary and non-literary college-level reading in the context of major efforts by the U.S. Department of Education, states like Arkansas, and private foundations like the Gates Foundation (2009) to increase dramatically the number of high school students who go on to two- or four-year colleges and graduate within a reasonable number of years. We also wanted to explore whether there is an English curriculum in the sense of a consciously planned course of study that not only requires students to read progressively more challenging works from grade 9 to grade 12 but also builds their understanding of literature and the English language.

Our second question concerned how teachers approached the literature they assigned and the time they allotted to literary study. Did they tend to use both a close, analytical reading of texts as well as a reader response approach, as Arthur Applebee noted in his 1993 report, did they use these

approaches for non-fiction as well as fiction, poetry, and drama, and did they seem to allow sufficient time for the close reading of imaginative literature and literary non-fiction?

### **B. How this study differs from earlier studies on titles in the secondary English curriculum**

There are few studies to examine, a telling point in itself. This study differs from other surveys of the content of the high school English curriculum in two ways. First, we look at the book-length works English teachers across three consecutive grade levels assign with respect to total number, reading difficulty, and text length. Past studies on the literary content of the secondary English curriculum have been driven by other interests.

Scarvia Anderson's 1964 study was designed to find out simply what book-length works were assigned in secondary English classes in a national spaced sampling of 222 public schools (grades 7-12), 223 Catholic schools (grades 9-12), 192 independent schools (grades 7-12), and a special sample of 54 urban high schools. Her study presented information on the most frequently assigned works, their grade level placement, and the differences across types of schools. Information came from mailed surveys that were filled out by English department chairs, principals, or English teachers. The 222 public schools represented a response rate of 30%. She found that the most frequently assigned works were long recognized works of literature spanning many centuries of British and American literature.

One of Arthur Applebee's studies in 1989 (Applebee, 1993) replicated Anderson's 1964 study. He, too, sought to find out what book-length works were assigned in secondary English classes in a national spaced sampling of 322 public schools (grades 7-12), 80 Catholic schools (grades 9-12), 86 independent schools (grades 9-12), and a special sample of 55 urban high schools. His study presented information on the most frequently assigned works, their grade level placement, and differences across types of schools and curriculum tracks. Information came from mailed surveys that were most often filled out by English department chairs. The 322 public schools represented a response rate of 21.6 percent. A major motivation for his study was to determine the extent to which major assigned works were drawn from what he termed a "white, male, Anglo-Saxon tradition" and thus did not include works by women and members of minority groups. Among the questions he explored were: Were the assigned works of literary merit? "Did they adequately reflect the diversity of American culture?" "Did they give students a sense of a common cultural heritage?" He found many changes in the curriculum during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "particularly among the short story, poetry, and nonfiction selections." But, he did not find the changes that have taken place "sufficient to reflect the multicultural heritage of the United States." His report did not suggest how sufficiency can be judged or why a reflection of this country's "multicultural heritage" should be the (or a) major goal of school literature curricula .

Second, we look at titles assigned in only one state. As a result, our interpretation of the responses to our survey and the focus group interviews can be clearer inasmuch as state policies can affect the school curriculum in strikingly different ways. English teachers may be trained in professional programs that reflect common ideas on what English teachers should teach and how, and they are certainly influenced by their national professional organizations. But individual state policies may uniquely influence teaching conditions and classroom curricula.

### **C. How this study differs from earlier studies on instruction in the secondary English class**

James Squire and Roger Applebee (1968) reported results of a five-year study that examined outstanding high school English programs. The study selected "outstanding" high school English

programs and then examined them through classroom observations, individual interviews, group meetings with teachers and students, and the use of checklists and questionnaires. The study sampled high schools based first on their students' recurring success on the NCTE Achievement Awards in writing and second on recommendations by professors of English and education as "highly regarded." Altogether, 158 schools, 1331 teachers, and 13,291 students participated in creating a comprehensive, national picture of what outstanding English programs do. Among their many observations, they found a strong emphasis on close reading of texts in the literature classroom. They also found 52 percent of instructional time dedicated to the study of literature. Because of its scope, Squire and Applebee's study provided the first body of information on the pedagogy for teaching literature in high school English in this country.

Another of Arthur Applebee's 1989 studies looked at the pedagogy teachers used for literary study and the time they allotted to it (Applebee, 1993). He surveyed a total of 650 schools divided into five independent samples: a nationally representative sample of public schools, two samples of schools with award-winning programs, and two nationally representative samples of private schools (Catholic and independent). The national sample comprised about 170 public schools. Questionnaires were completed by the English department chair, librarian, and three English teachers in each school.

In a summary of his findings on approaches to literary study, he noted that "teachers reported a dual emphasis on techniques loosely related to reader-response theories, and on those associated more directly with New Critical close analyses of text." Teachers "did not see these emphases as being in conflict with one another." Table 7.4 in Applebee's 1993 report shows that of the 116 public schools in the national survey from which he obtained data, 67 percent of the teachers reported using a reader response approach emphasizing student interpretations, while 50% percent reported using an approach stressing a close reading of the text. He comments further:

The eclectic melding of reader-and text-centered traditions that was apparent in teachers' goals and approaches raises a variety of questions about the consistency and coherence of the approaches teachers are adopting. ...there are fundamental differences in criteria for adequacy of response and interpretation, in the role of historical and intertextual knowledge, and in what is considered of primary and of secondary importance in discourse about literature.

Applebee concluded in his 1993 report that a "re-examination of literature curriculum and instruction is necessary to provide teachers with a unifying framework that will better inform their decisions about what and how they teach." But what he means by a unifying framework is not clear (Applebee, Burroughs, and Stevens, 2000), nor has he yet presented one to the field, to our knowledge.

Our study differed from these earlier studies in a fundamental way. We sought to understand, in part, how high school English teachers view the conditions for literary study in their schools and what pedagogical strategies they most frequently employ in the larger context of unsatisfactory academic achievement in K-12 reading and English in a single state.

## **IV. Methodology**

### **A. Sample Selection**

The pool of Arkansas teachers to be interviewed consisted of all English teachers listed in the database of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) as teaching general (standard) or

honors level English courses in grades 9, 10, and 11, regardless of whether they taught in middle or high school—for a total of 1402 teachers. This database, available on the ADE web site, is based on mandatory self-reports from all teachers in public schools in Arkansas and is updated on an annual basis. Thus the “sample” in this project is the entire population of English teachers in Arkansas who teach standard or honors courses in grades 9 – 11.

The database contains a unique case for each course taught. In order to obtain a random selection of courses taught, teachers who taught three or more grade-level courses (that included grades 9, 10, and 11) were randomly assigned two of these grade-level courses to answer questions about. If a teacher taught only two of these grade-level courses, they were assigned to the two courses. Once these teachers were assigned two courses to describe, they were instructed to refer to the first section of the two courses they taught each week. If a teacher taught only one grade-level course (grade 9, 10, or 11) and multiple sections of it, they were to answer questions about the first two sections they teach in a typical week. These procedures ensured a representative sample of 9th, 10th, and 11th grade curricula and minimized possible differences by sections that might have occurred if teachers had been allowed to choose the section to describe. See Appendix A and Appendix B for a copy of the protocols that were used for the telephone and mailed surveys.

## **B. Data Collection**

Several methods were used for data collection. Telephone calls to the schools in Arkansas were made beginning on March 20, 2009 in order to obtain the best contact information for the individual teachers. If individual teachers could be reached at that time, they were asked to take the survey over the phone or to schedule a time that was better for them.

As an alternative, when possible, the email address for the individual teachers was obtained. This email address was collected in a database. Periodically, as most emails were obtained, an email was sent to teachers asking them to either contact the UNH Survey Center to schedule a phone interview, or to allow them to take a web version of the survey. The web address to the survey was given in this email, along with an ID code for the teacher to enter for tracking purposes and to help ensure that someone who completed the survey was not re-contacted.

Emails were sent in batches as addresses were accumulated. These were sent on March 23 and 25 and on April 1 and 14. A large reminder email to everyone who had not taken the survey was sent on April 28. On April 15, a paper version of the survey was created and faxed to a school that specifically requested a fax version of the survey. Finally, on May 5, a paper version of the survey was mailed to all teachers in the sample who had not yet completed any version of the survey. See Appendix C for copies of all the types of letters that were sent to schools and/or teachers to recruit respondents.

## **C. Methodology for Focus Group Meetings**

To help us interpret findings from the survey, we planned eight focus group meetings across the state, two in each of the state's four Congressional districts, in order to speak directly with some of the teachers who had completed a survey. The University of New Hampshire's Survey Center sent us the list of the over 400 teachers who had completed the survey by September 1, 2009, and we organized their high schools by Congressional district. Approximately equal numbers of teachers were located across the four Congressional districts (98, 97, 114, and 101), confirming that we had received surveys from a random sample of English teachers across the state. We then randomly selected over 20 teachers from each Congressional district to attend one of the two meetings scheduled in their district. Among the items in Appendix A is a copy of the invitation

used to contact the teachers by telephone or e-mail. Altogether, 42 English teachers attended the meetings, a much smaller number than we had hoped would attend, and they do not necessarily reflect the views of all Arkansas English teachers. They were given \$50 for their time and travel expenses. Appendix D contains a list of the eight sites for the meetings, the high schools represented by the teachers who attended these meeting, and a copy of the questionnaire we used for the meetings. Each group interview lasted ninety minutes and was audio recorded. The tapes were later transcribed into a summary by a research associate.

#### **D. Use of ATOS for Books Readability Formula**

Curriculum developers and educational publishers have long used quantitative (objective) measures as well qualitative (impressionistic) measures reflecting teachers' or editors' judgments to estimate the reading difficulty of a literary work and other kinds of reading material. The Dale-Chall Readability Formula, for example, still one of the most used readability formulas, was developed in the late 1940s. Like most other readability formulas, it consists of a measure of word difficulty and a measure of sentence difficulty. Unlike some other formulas, it also produces a score that indicates the grade level placement for a text.

To gauge the level of reading difficulty of the major literary works assigned by English teachers in this survey, we decided to use ATOS for Books, a readability formula developed by Renaissance Learning, the company that produces Accelerated Learning (AR), a computerized system for tracking the books read by K-12 students and their comprehension of them. ATOS for Books incorporates book length (number of words), an important variable not previously used in readability formulas. The formula is thus adjusted upward for longer books and downward for shorter books.<sup>10</sup> Not only is it the only readability formula specifically designed for books, it also produces a score that indicates the grade level placement for a text. The reading levels of all the books in the Accelerated Reader database were determined by ATOS for Books.<sup>11</sup>

Gauging the reading level of a literary text has always posed challenges—to teachers as well as publishers. Readability formulas do not work well for poetry, for example. Adjustments need to be made to account for the complexity of meaning in what might appear to be a linguistically simple text. Life experiences as well as cultural and literary knowledge strongly influence understanding and interpretation, in contrast to the more straightforward, literal demands made by the vocabulary and textual density of science textbooks in particular.

However, the assumption that control of vocabulary difficulty and the complexity of sentence structure was not as necessary at the high school level because most high school students could be expected to read adult-level writing disappeared forever during the 1970s and 1980s when the large number of high school students who could not read beyond an elementary school level of difficulty needed to be addressed better by textbook publishers. In response to teachers' requests for textbooks that could accommodate a wide range of reading skills, publishers deliberately and regularly reduced the vocabulary load and syntactic complexity of their subject area textbooks—usually using a readability formula to gauge their level of difficulty (Chall, Conard, and Harris, 1977; Hayes, Wolfer, and Wolfe, 1996). In some English classes, abridged or adapted versions of well-known literary texts were used for poorer readers. But more and more English teachers sought literary texts that were shorter, less complex in their plots and characterizations, and more contemporary in their themes and settings, in an effort to address both their students' limited reading skills and limited motivation to read.

## **E. Use of Qualitative Measures**

We also drew on qualitative approaches to measuring reading difficulty because they suggest the dimensions along which literary works can be judged for curricular placement. In the 1990s, Jeanne Chall and her associates (Chall et al, 1996) developed a series of sample reading passages in different subject areas that increased in difficulty over the grades; editors or teachers could quickly match passages from a longer work to these sample passages in order to gauge its approximate reading level.

In constructing a continuum of literary passages illustrating increasing difficulty level, Chall and her associates established benchmarks for (1) breadth of vocabulary, (2) complexity and formality of sentence structures, (3) needed depth and breadth of life experiences required, (4) extent of cultural and literary knowledge needed, and (5) skill and sophistication in literary analysis. They constructed scaled passages not only for literature (good narrative fiction, as they described it) but also for popular fiction because it “became clear that the literature scale was not an entirely appropriate guide for judging the reading level of popular works” (e.g., books often published in series and magazines intended for audiences of different ages). They comment: “generally, the popular fiction selections...do not require sophisticated literary analysis, broad cultural background, or a capacity for reflecting on a range of experiences and a multiplicity of values—demands made on readers by the highest-level passages in the literature scale. Neither do the historical and cross-cultural dimensions of those passages carry over to popular fiction, which is essentially contemporary. The reading level of popular fiction varies more directly in proportion to its linguistic difficulty (vocabulary and sentence structure) than is true for the literature selections. Thus, it is more accurately measured by most traditional readability formulas...”

The main differences they noted between popular fiction and literature are:

1. Explicitness vs. implication. “Popular fiction uses less figurative language and makes few allusions.”
2. Single vs. multiple layers of meaning. “Because of its suggestiveness and ambiguity, literature usually cannot yield its full meaning in one reading.”
3. Redundancy vs. conciseness of expression. “Popular fiction is more redundant than literature...knowledge of unfamiliar words may not be as crucial for comprehension as in the reading of literature which is more concise.”
4. Conventionality vs. individuality and distinctiveness. “Popular fiction is more conventional in its language than literature is; and since its language generally follows expected patterns, a reader need not pay as close attention to it. The moral universe of popular fiction also tends to be more conventional and simple than that of literature.”

We draw upon these distinctions in the discussion of the findings of our study and the guidelines we recommend for strengthening secondary English curricula in Arkansas.

## **F. Respondents to the Survey**

A total of 430 teachers completed the survey, although they did not all answer every question on the survey (see Appendix E: Tables D1 to D10). Five of the 430 teachers did not indicate the grade level of the courses they taught, so information is provided only on the courses/classes taught by the 425 teachers who indicated grade level. The distribution of class descriptions was fairly even across the grades for courses whose grade level was clear: 253 grade 9 classes, 267 grade 10 classes, 255 grade 11 classes, and 9 mixed grade classes—for a total of 784 courses. 243 teachers described classes at the same grade: 75 teachers described two grade 9 classes; 71 teachers described two grade 10 classes; and 77 teachers described two grade 11 classes. At least

182 of the 425 teachers taught classes at two different grade levels (meaning, at the very least, more than one preparation per day). Keep in mind that the project chose to exclude Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, as well as classes described as advanced, elective, or remedial. Most of the teachers who responded to the survey described "standard" courses (80 percent). The other 20 percent described "honors" courses, often designated as Pre-AP courses, we were told in the focus group interviews.

With respect to class size, 78 percent taught 25 students or fewer in their classes; 49 percent taught 20 or fewer. State law sets a maximum of 150 students per day, but large class size is not an issue in general, especially in the state's many small high schools. The number of different classes typically taught per day, however, is an issue that needs to be noted. The school day across Arkansas is typically divided into seven or eight periods, and most English teachers teach six or seven classes per day.

The vast majority of teachers responding were females (87 percent). Interestingly, the average Arkansas teacher has been teaching for a shorter period of time than the average teacher in a national survey undertaken for the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics during the same period of time (Stotsky, 2010). Almost 39 percent of Arkansas teachers have been teaching English five years or fewer, regardless of grade level.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, about 18 percent of teachers responding to the ALSC survey indicated they have been teaching English five years or fewer, regardless of grade level (Table 6). With respect to longevity of experience, only 28 percent of the Arkansas teachers have been teaching more than 15 years, while almost 47 percent of the teachers in the ALSC survey have. Of those answering the question (396), 69 percent of the Arkansas teachers said they had a Bachelor of Arts degree in English or literature. Only 80 teachers indicated they had a master's degree, 34 of whom had a Master of Arts degree. 244 teachers (57 percent) indicated they taught only English or literature; 37 percent teach other subjects; 5 percent did not reply.

**Table 6: Number of Years Teaching English, Regardless of Grade Level**

Age Ranges	National Survey		Arkansas Survey	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Two years or less	22	5.5	69	17.6
Three to five years	50	12.6	83	21.2
Six to ten years	85	21.4	83	21.2
Eleven to fifteen years	55	13.8	47	12.0
More than fifteen years	186	46.7	109	27.9
Total	398	100	391	100

## V. Survey Results

### A. What major titles did English teachers assign in standard and honors courses in grades 9, 10, and 11, and how many per class?

These related questions were intended to find out whether Arkansas students in standard and honors courses are assigned mature works of literature to read and whether they are typically assigned more than one per class or course. And, were they assigned progressively longer, more difficult, and more complex works to read from year to year in the high school grades in the context of a planned curriculum?



### 1. Major Titles Assigned

The survey data indicate that many Arkansas teachers still assign mature works of fiction, drama, and book-length poems in standard and honors courses in grades 9-11. Table 7 shows the (25) major works of fiction, drama, and book-length poems mentioned 15 or more times overall. For a complete list of all major titles assigned across all courses or classes, see Appendix G.

**Table 7: Major Titles Assigned 15 or More Times**

Novel/Plays/Book-Length Poems	N	Percent of Total Number of Courses (N=784)
Romeo And Juliet	204	28.30%
Julius Caesar	175	24.20%
The Crucible	169	23.40%
To Kill A Mockingbird	149	20.60%
The Great Gatsby	97	13.40%
Of Mice And Men	92	12.70%
Antigone	80	11.10%
The Odyssey	71	9.80%
Animal Farm	70	9.70%
Night	70	9.70%
The Scarlet Letter	68	9.40%
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	61	8.40%
A Separate Peace	53	7.30%
Lord of The Flies	42	5.80%
A Raisin In The Sun	41	5.70%
Fahrenheit 451	40	5.50%
The Outsiders	38	5.30%
Great Expectations	33	4.60%
Anthem	32	4.40%
The Glass Menagerie	25	3.50%
The Red Badge Of Courage	23	3.20%
Our Town	23	3.20%
The Miracle Worker	23	3.20%
Their Eyes Were Watching God	21	2.90%
Macbeth	16	2.20%
Other	727	

As can be seen, they reflect recognized works written over many centuries, from ancient Greece and England to contemporary America, and by mostly British and American authors. Table 8 shows the 20 most frequently assigned titles in order of frequency, their readability level, their word count, their distribution across grade levels, and as a percentage of the total number of courses (784). Tables 9, 10, and 11 show the 15 most frequently assigned titles in grade 9, 10, and 11. Many of the other titles mentioned at each grade level are also recognized literary works.

Because of the small percentages for almost all of the titles listed either by grade level or overall, it seems reasonable to infer that Arkansas students in standard and honors courses experience a unique configuration of readings in their high school years. The last column in Table 8 shows each title as a percentage of the total number of courses. As can be seen, the percentages are all under 30 percent. In fact, only four titles are mentioned enough (148 times or more) to show up in at least 20 percent of the courses. All the rest of the 20 most frequently assigned titles appear in 13 percent or fewer of the 784 courses described in the surveys. And, what is most worthy of notice, only four are at a high school readability level: *Julius Caesar*, *The Odyssey*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Great Expectations*. Certainly, many more of these titles are mature works of fiction or drama and are appropriate in a high school curriculum; contemporary plays tend to have low readability levels because they consist of informal dialogue. But they do not typically introduce students to difficult or complex sentence structure and vocabulary.

**Table 8: The 20 Most Frequently Assigned Titles, their Readability Level, Word Count, and Grade Level Distribution, and as a Percentage of the Total Number of Classes\***

	Title	Reading Level**	Word Count	9 253	10 267	11 255	Mixed 9	Total	As a Percent of Total Number of Classes (784)
1	Romeo and Juliet	(8.6, UG)	25599	202	2	0	0	204	28.30%
2	Julius Caesar	(10.8, UG)	27309	3	170	1	1	175	24.20%
3	The Crucible	(4.9, UG)	35560	0	10	159	0	169	23.40%
4	To Kill A Mockingbird	(5.6, UG)	99121	65	44	39	1	149	20.60%
5	The Great Gatsby	(7.3, UG)	47094	2	7	88	0	97	13.40%
6	Of Mice and Men	(4.5, UG)	29572	11	39	42	0	92	12.70%
7	Antigone	(5.3, UG)	11061	1	78	1	0	80	11.10%
8	The Odyssey	(10.3, UG)	120,133	69	2	0	0	71	9.80%
9	Animal Farm	(7.3, UG)	29060	46	23	1	0	70	9.70%
10	Night	(4.8, UG)	28404	28	31	11	0	70	9.70%
11	The Scarlet Letter	(11.7, UG)	63604	0	7	61	0	68	9.40%
12	Huckleberry Finn	( 6.7, MG)	109,571	12	11	38	0	61	8.40%
13	A Separate Peace	(6.9, UG)	56787	12	36	5	0	53	7.30%
14	Lord of The Flies	(5, UG)	59900	16	20	6	0	42	5.80%
15	Fahrenheit 451	(5.2, UG)	45910	8	23	10	0	41	5.50%
16	A Raisin In The Sun	(5.5, UG)	31391	2	12	27	0	41	5.70%
17	The Outsiders	(4.7, UG)	48523	22	11	5	0	38	5.30%
18	Great Expectations	(9.2, UG)	183,349	26	5	2	0	33	4.60%
19	Anthem	(6.1, UG)	19142	12	16	4	0	32	4.40%
20	The Glass Menagerie	(5.3, UG)	20698	0	17	18	0	25	3.50%

\*The number in the grade level columns indicates the number of times the title was mentioned at that grade level.

\*\*UG (Upper Grade) and MG (Middle Grade) are designations by Renaissance Learning for maturity level.

**Table 9: Top 15 Titles in Grade 9**

Romeo and Juliet	(8.6, UG)	25,599	202
The Odyssey	(10.3, UG)	120,133	69
To Kill A Mockingbird	(5.6, UG)	99,121	65
Animal Farm	(7.3, UG)	29,060	46
Night	(4.8, UG)	28,404	28
Great Expectations	(9.2, UG)	183,349	26
The Miracle Worker	(5.2, UG)	26,820	22
The Outsiders	(4.7, UG)	48,523	22
Lord of The Flies	(5, UG)	59,900	16
The Giver	(5.7, MG)	43,617	15
A Separate Peace	(6.9, UG)	56,787	12
Anthem	(6.1, UG)	19,142	12
Huckleberry Finn	(6.7, MG)	109,571	12
Of Mice and Men	(4.5, UG)	29,572	11
Wish You Well			6

**Table 10: Top 15 Titles in Grade 10**

Julius Caesar	(10.8, UG)	27,309	170
Antigone	(5.3, UG)	11,061	78
To Kill A Mockingbird	(5.6, UG)	99,121	44
Of Mice and Men	(4.5, UG)	29,572	39
A Separate Peace	(6.9, UG)	56,787	36
Night	(4.8, UG)	28,404	31
Animal Farm	(7.3, UG)	29,060	23
Fahrenheit 451	(5.2, UG)	45,910	23
Lord of The Flies	(5, UG)	59,900	20
Anthem	(6.1, UG)	19,142	16
Oedipus the King	(5.6, UG)	14,943	12
A Raisin In The Sun	(5.5, UG)	31,391	12
Huckleberry Finn	(6.7, MG)	109,571	11
The Outsiders	(4.7, UG)	48,523	11
Of Mice and Men	(4.5, UG)	29,572	11
The Crucible	(4.9, UG)	35,560	10
Their Eyes Were Watching God	(5.6, UG)	63,783	10

**Table 11: Top 15 Titles in Grade 11**

The Crucible	(4.9, UG)	35,560	159
The Great Gatsby	(7.3, UG)	47,094	88
The Scarlet Letter	(11.7, UG)	63,604	61
Of Mice and Men	(4.5, UG)	29,572	42
To Kill A Mockingbird	(5.6, UG)	99,121	39
Huckleberry Finn	(6.7, MG)	109,571	38
A Raisin In The Sun	(5.5, UG)	31,391	27
The Glass Menagerie	(5.3, UG)	20,698	18
The Grapes of Wrath	(4.9, UG)	169,481	18
The Red Badge Of Courage	(8, UG)	45,974	15
Our Town	(3.9, UG)	18,458	14
Macbeth	(10.9, UG)	19,048	13
Hamlet	(10.5, UG)	32,044	11
Their Eyes Were Watching God	(5.6, UG)	63,783	11
Night	(4.8, UG)	28,404	11
Fahrenheit 451	(5.2, UG)	45,910	10

Table 8 suggests that close to 80 percent of the students in standard and honors classes read *Romeo and Juliet* in grade 9, and that about 64 percent of the students in these classes read *Julius Caesar* in grade 10. But it is not possible to discern from these lists what other titles these students have read at either grade 9 or 10, since percentages for the other works mentioned at these two grade levels are well under 50 percent. These data reveal a fragmented literature curriculum in Arkansas.

Nor are students experiencing a coherent mini-curriculum addressing their own regional literature. As their absence suggests, and as teachers in the focus groups confirmed, Arkansas teachers do not stress Arkansas, Southern, or minority writers. They all know that Maya Angelou grew up in Stamps, and some teachers assign *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Many also know that John Grisham's *The Painted House*, a fictional work, is about his growing up in Arkansas, and a few teachers assign his book. But none mentioned the works of Donald Harrington, a highly regarded Arkansan who wrote fiction as well as nonfiction about life in Arkansas, while only a few mentioned Miller Williams, an Arkansan who served as Poet Laureate under President Clinton. I think this paragraph seems out of place and does not flow from the previous—is there something missing? Is it necessary?

Because most of the literature that Arkansas teachers assign was written well before 1970, the small percentages for almost all titles on these lists imply how little may be left elsewhere of a coherent and progressive English literature curriculum with respect to two of its major functions: (1) to acquaint students with the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people and (2) to develop an understanding of the language needed for authentic college coursework.

How much has changed in just the past 20 years alone is suggested by the comparison in Table 12 showing the top ten titles across grade levels in the Arkansas survey with the ten most frequently assigned titles by school in more than 50 percent of the public schools Applebee surveyed in the late 1980s (Applebee, 1993). It is important to note that Applebee's study included the different types of classes in grades 9-12 (i.e., AP, IB, advanced, and basic, as well as elective courses), not just standard and honors classes in grades 9-11. Moreover, his unit of analysis was the school, not

**Table 12: The Ten Most Assigned Titles across Grades 9-11 in Arkansas in 2009\* and the Ten Most Assigned Titles in 322 Schools in Grades 9-12 in 1989\*\***

Top Ten Titles in Grades 9-11 in Arkansas in 2009		Top Ten Titles in 322 Schools in Grades 9-12 in 1989	
Romeo and Juliet (G. 9)	80%	Romeo and Juliet	84%
Julius Caesar (G.10)	64%	Macbeth	81%
The Crucible (G.11)	63%	Huckleberry Finn	70%
The Great Gatsby (G.11)	35%	Julius Caesar	70%
Antigone (G.10)	30%	To Kill a Mockingbird	69%
The Odyssey (G.9)	28%	Scarlet Letter	62%
To Kill a Mockingbird (G.9)	26%	Of Mice and Men	56%
The Scarlet Letter (G.11)	24%	Hamlet	55%
Animal Farm (G.9)	18%	Great Gatsby	54%
To Kill a Mockingbird (G.10)	17%	Lord of the Flies	54%

\* These percentages are based on descriptions of 784 standard and honors courses in these grades. They show the percentage of courses assigning the work at the grade level where it tended to be taught the most. Only one title (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) was frequently taught at two different grade levels.

\*\*Excerpted from Table 5.4: Most Popular Titles of Book-Length Works, Grades 9-12  
Arthur Applebee, *Literature in the Secondary School*, NCTE Research Report No.25, 1993.

individual courses. Thus, his methodology captured the maximum assignment of these titles, not a profile of what any one student might have read from grade 9 to grade 12. On the other hand, the Arkansas survey addresses what the student in the “broad middle” has been assigned to read in grades 9-11 because we excluded basic or remedial classes as well as AP, IB, advanced, or elective courses). It seems unlikely that the large differences in percentages from 1989 to 2009 can be explained by just the differences in types of classes covered and in the unit of analysis.

Lists of the most frequently assigned titles can be highly misleading. Unless the percentage of courses assigning a title is very high (say, over 50 percent), lists of the most frequently assigned titles do not allow us to make claims about which groups of titles (if any) all or most students end up having read by grade 12. For example, *Antigone* is the seventh most frequently assigned title overall in Arkansas, but only 30 percent of students read it in grade 10, where it seems to be assigned (and the percentage in grades 9 and 11 is miniscule). *The Scarlet Letter* is the eleventh most frequently assigned title overall in Arkansas, but in grade 11, where it tends to be assigned, only 24 percent of the courses assign it. A tiny percentage of courses in grades 9 and 11 include it. Because so few students have read either work at each grade level, it is likely that a majority of the students who have read one of these works have not read the other. It is clearly the case that most students were assigned to read neither.

## 2. Reading Difficulty Level

Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 do not allow us to determine if students tend to read progressively more complex and difficult works from grades 9-11. So, can we say anything about the differences, if any, in the difficulty level of what students read from grade to grade without tracking the totality of what students read from grade to grade? We believe we can by looking first at the total number of major works of fiction, drama, or book-length poems assigned per grade. As Table 13 shows, the typical number of major titles of novels, plays, and long poems assigned was 2, 3, or 4 in 2008-2009. For grade 9, 169 of 230 class descriptions included 2 to 4 titles. For grade 10, 150 of 230 did so. For grade 11, 152 of 238 grade 11 classes did so.

Table 13 also shows the mean readability level by number of major titles assigned by grade for all classes. There is very little difference in the mean readability level either at any one grade as the number of major titles assigned increases, or from grade to grade when the same number of titles is assigned. Most mean readability levels are between 6th and 7th grade. These data suggest that students in standard or honors classes are, overall, not reading a more challenging group of major titles from grade to grade.

Moreover, while there is a slight increase in the minimum readability level at any one grade as the number of major titles assigned increases, most are between 4th and 5th grade. Maximum readability levels tend to diminish with five or more assigned titles per grade (they range from seventh to ninth grade in reading difficulty). These scores suggest that most teachers of standard or honors classes in grades 9, 10, and 11 tend to include a balance of easy and hard books in each class at all grades, no matter how many major titles they assign, and that when they assign many titles, it is likely because they need to assign many more and easier titles to address the range of student reading levels in them.

Here is where current state policy requiring the teaching of AP courses in every high school may be exerting an influence on the data we collected. As the focus group teachers indicated, all of the better readers in grade 11 or grade 12 (and some who are not so able) are allowed (or encouraged) to enroll in the AP classes. They seem to constitute about one third or more of a class cohort. In addition, better readers are placed, or encouraged to enroll, in a Pre-AP class in grade 10 or sometimes in grade 9. Thus required AP and Pre-AP classes enable a larger number

of able and/or motivated readers than were probably enrolled in advanced classes before the policy was enacted to experience a more challenging and perhaps more coherent curriculum than they would have experienced if they were in regular English classes in grades 9, 10, and 11 with

**Table 13: Mean Readability Level by Number of Titles Assigned by Grade**

Number of Titles Assigned	Grade	N	Mean Readability	Minimum Readability	Maximum Readability
1	9th Grade	21	7.8365	4.70	8.73
	10th Grade	16	7.6844	4.50	10.80
	11th Grade	34	6.3808	3.90	11.70
	Total	71	7.1051	3.90	11.70
2	9th Grade	67	7.8733	4.95	10.55
	10th Grade	45	7.8233	4.75	10.80
	11th Grade	47	6.0811	4.55	10.45
	Total	159	7.3294	4.55	10.80
3	9th Grade	61	7.2276	4.77	8.73
	10th Grade	55	7.3191	4.60	10.80
	11th Grade	70	6.8061	4.70	11.70
	Total	186	7.0960	4.60	11.70
4	9th Grade	41	7.0170	5.68	9.37
	10th Grade	50	7.0840	4.65	10.80
	11th Grade	33	6.4653	4.60	9.90
	Total	124	6.8972	4.60	10.80
5	9th Grade	24	6.9450	4.93	8.04
	10th Grade	33	7.2147	5.70	9.05
	11th Grade	31	6.7216	4.93	9.50
	Total	88	6.9674	4.93	9.50
6	9th Grade	11	7.1703	6.30	8.10
	10th Grade	13	6.7242	5.73	8.08
	11th Grade	9	6.1556	5.17	6.88
	Total	33	6.7178	5.17	8.10
7 or more	9th Grade	2	6.8025	6.43	7.18
	10th Grade	13	6.7237	5.60	7.23
	11th Grade	10	7.2019	5.32	9.58
	Total	25	6.9213	5.32	9.58
Total	9th Grade	227	7.4001	4.70	10.55
	10th Grade	225	7.3096	4.50	10.80
	11th Grade	234	6.5313	3.90	11.70
	Total	686	7.0741	3.90	11.70

large numbers of limited readers in them. (We assume that most high schools in Arkansas, small or large, provided an advanced English class for its most able readers before the state mandated open enrollment AP classes in each high school, meaning that a small number of very able students typically experienced a more challenging curriculum in the past. The AP mandate has dramatically expanded enrollment in, and the numbers of, advanced English classes in both grade 11 and grade 12, where AP classes are offered, and in what might be considered advanced classes in grade 9 or 10 if Pre-AP classes are also taught.)

**Table 14: Mean Word Count by Number of Titles Assigned by Grade**

Number of Titles	Grade	N	Mean Word Count	Minimum Word Count	Maximum Word Count
1	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	21	35152.3571	16154.00	109571.00
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	16	29406.0312	11061.00	59900.00
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	34	48864.7886	18458.00	109571.00
	Total	71	40423.9269	11061.00	109571.00
2	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	67	56245.6169	18800.00	113483.00
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	45	41026.4063	19185.00	105329.00
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	47	46739.6440	20698.00	109571.00
	Total	159	49128.3515	18800.00	113483.00
3	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	61	51809.6393	23625.67	88578.33
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	55	39353.9955	11061.00	78667.00
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	70	53954.6857	18498.00	108287.50
	Total	186	48933.7944	11061.00	108287.50
4	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	41	58323.2431	27277.25	109693.67
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	50	38262.4807	11061.00	88500.50
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	33	50468.2813	17526.50	98942.50
	Total	124	48143.7926	11061.00	109693.67
5	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	24	56640.5625	41716.80	82471.25
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	33	42797.8717	19185.00	78568.60
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	31	55137.5226	33901.00	81643.75
	Total	88	50920.0735	19185.00	82471.25
6	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11	64944.1818	50876.00	78145.33
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	13	48502.6128	32962.75	82049.67
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	9	61198.3926	42838.17	87405.17
	Total	33	57445.6212	32962.75	87405.17
7 or more	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2	53237.7500	45424.50	61051.00
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	13	43957.7122	27547.00	58060.14
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10	60271.2852	33092.50	91540.00
	Total	25	51225.5444	27547.00	91540.00
Total	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	227	53914.2370	16154.00	113483.00
	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	225	40038.1891	11061.00	105329.00
	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	234	51979.5254	17526.50	109571.00
	Total	686	48703.1098	11061.00	113483.00

The data in Table 14 on mean word count appear to corroborate this interpretation. The mean word count increases somewhat as the number of books assigned increases (total mean word count is over 40,000 for one title assigned and is over 51,000 for seven or more titles assigned). But, the maximum word count appears to go down as the number of books assigned increases, and the minimum word count appears to go down from grade to grade even when the number of books assigned remains the same. Moreover, teachers who assign many major titles tend to have the smallest range in word count (from minimum to maximum). These trends, too, suggest the presence of a larger number of students with limited reading skills in higher grades and in classes where many titles are assigned.

### 3. Anthology Use

Did teachers have an anthology and to what extent did they use it? Survey responses indicated that between 61 and 70 percent use an anthology, and there is little difference from grade to grade in having and using an anthology (Table 15). However, most teachers teach fewer than half of the selections in their anthology; 71 percent of ninth-grade teachers, 79 percent of tenth-grade teachers, and 73 percent of eleventh-grade teachers teach fewer than half the selections (Table 16). Table 17 shows the anthologies they use; almost all are by major publishers of high school anthologies.

**Table 15: Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?**

(Q5) Grade	Yes	No	Number of Courses
Grade 9	70%	30%	238
Grade 10	61%	39%	257
Grade 11	67%	33%	251

**Table 16: About what percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read?**

(Q7) Grade	1 to 10 percent	11 to 20 percent	21 to 30 percent	31 to 40 percent	41 to 50 percent	51 to 70 percent	71 to 100 percent	Number of Classes
Grade 9	14%	9%	19%	13%	17%	17%	12%	182
Grade 10	10%	11%	20%	14%	24%	11%	10%	176
Grade 11	8%	15%	17%	19%	13%	15%	12%	178

**Table 17: Anthologies Mentioned by Grade Level**

Publisher	Grade 9*	Grade 10**	Grade 11***
Holt	70	59	33
Glencoe	47	47	20
Prentice Hall	39	43	19
Other	12	16	8

Note: Some teachers explicitly said they did not use an anthology. Most did not give editions or dates.

\*Other includes: EMC (6), Norton (2), McDougal Littell (2), Holt/McDougal (2)

\*\*Other includes: Harcourt (3), EMC (2), *Literature & Language* (2), *Literature & Language Arts* (2), *Literature, Reading, Reacting, Writing* (1), Longman (1), *Perrine's* (1), *Literature: The Reader's Choice* (1), *Language of Composition* (1), *The Bedford Reader* (1)

\*\*\*Other includes: *Literature & Language Arts* (2), *Readers for Writers* (2), *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* (1), *The Bedford Reader* (1), *Framers of Mind* (1), Norton (1)

### 4. Major Poets, Short Story Writers, and Non-Fiction Authors Assigned

Appendix H provides the details on the major poets, short story writers, and non-fiction authors Arkansas teachers assign. The details confirm what these teachers indicated about anthology use.



Almost all of the poets and short story writers they mentioned are recognized authors and in the anthologies they use (Q9; Q10). Many fewer specific book-length works of non-fiction were mentioned, and those few mentioned more than 15 or more times (Q21) are mainly autobiographies (e.g., Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Frederick Douglass’s and Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography). In 355 classes, no book-length non-fiction was assigned or the teacher didn’t mention anything specific. This number of classes is remarkably close to the number of classes in the national survey (341 classes) in which book-length non-fiction is not assigned or the teacher didn’t mention anything specific, confirming what the focus group teachers in Arkansas agreed: students have minimal exposure to high quality book-length works of historical non-fiction in their English courses (Stotsky, 2010). These results are consistent with the results of a survey on the extent to which high school students are assigned to write term papers based on their reading of historical non-fiction (*The Concord Review*, 2002). Many teachers in Arkansas mentioned assigning a biography or autobiography of their choice to students for a book review or research paper, so it remains a popular genre. They also noted in their open responses that much if not most of the non-fiction their students read comes from the anthologies they use; publishers have included many examples or excerpts of non-fiction for many years in their anthologies, often in the form of biographical sketches of the authors featured, as well as speeches and essays by recognized writers. The rest of the non-fiction teachers assign tends to come from newspapers or magazines—typically short selections or excerpts.

Historically important speeches or essays tend to be taught in grade 11 because that is the year that students in standard and honors courses study American literature. Martin Luther King, Jr. is the most frequently mentioned speech or essay writer, in about one-third of all classes at each grade level. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, and Abraham Lincoln appear in one-fifth to one-third of the classes in grade 11 (Q22). Most if not all of the authors of essays or speeches teachers mentioned are in their anthologies.

**5. Title Selection**

How are titles and authors selected? What guides the general choice of assignments for a grade or class? Check-off choices in the survey included teacher preference, department decision, school or district curriculum, student choice, or other. Multiple responses were possible

**Table 18: What guides the selection of major novels, plays, and book-length poems?**

(Q11) Grade	Teacher	Department	Curriculum	Students	Other	Number of Classes
Grade 9	88%	43%	41%	23%	8%	241
Grade 10	91%	41%	31%	20%	9%	254
Grade 11	91%	35%	33%	16%	6%	249

Across grade levels, about 90 percent of the teachers indicated that they themselves selected major novels, plays, and book-length poems (Table 18). About 40 percent indicated that their decisions were also influenced by departmental or curriculum decisions. About 20 percent said they were also influenced by student choice. The teachers in the focus groups clarified the picture; most said they consulted together as a department in their high schools to ensure "vertical alignment" (no repetition across grades), or they informally checked their personal choices with the other English teachers in their school, something relatively easy to do in a small high school, particularly if there was no departmental leadership on the matter.

Teachers in the focus groups noted that the titles they assigned reflected a number of variables: what had been assigned in the past, what complete sets of books were in their closets or available to them, what was in their anthologies, what they could purchase with the small funds made

available to them if they were new teachers, and what had been sent to them by publishers (or, with respect to *Anthem*, by the Ayn Rand Foundation if they agreed to submit class essays on the book to the Foundation). Teachers tend to allow students to choose what they want to read in their independent reading and in classes where they appear unmotivated or have poor reading skills. Teachers in the focus groups believe that students are more motivated to read when they can select their own books.

Choice takes place in two ways. Sometimes teachers provide a short list of books from which students must choose. Or they let students choose from a much longer list in another source. Teachers in the focus groups listed the following sources for student choice:

- Reading lists for AP English courses, which may be drawn on by Pre-AP students as well.
- Smart Step Literacy Lab's list of titles. Most are at the upper elementary or middle school level, and most were recently written.
- America's Choice list of adolescent "favorites."
- Young Adult Library Service Association (YALSA) list of 2009 Teens' Top Ten Nominations. All were recently written. Most are at the upper elementary or middle school level.
- Bluford Series. Each of the 15 young adult novels in this series is less than 200 pages. They are set in contemporary times in urban America, and most characters are African American. Teachers who used them found them very popular.
- Saddleback Shakespeare Classics. These are each about 96 pages long and intended for poor adolescent readers. Their readability levels ranges from 4.0 to 5.0.
- Accelerated Reader's list. A wide-ranging list spanning all grade levels in reading difficulty.
- Vampire books, sports biographies, and graphic novels.
- *100 Books You Should Read Before College*.

A total of 230 different titles were mentioned as assigned in grade 9 classes, 243 in grade 10 classes, and 245 in grade 11 classes. In none of the focus groups did teachers indicate a conscious deliberation about shaping what was offered at each grade level to reflect increasing cognitive growth or ideational or literary complexity—in other words, a more challenging curriculum from grade to grade with respect to the specific content of what they taught. They did pay careful attention to the general skills listed in the state's English standards (which are assessed on state tests) and, if their school had to follow a particular "School Improvement Plan" and had a contract with an outside agency to improve scores, they paid even more attention to the contractor's demands, about which we will say more later.

For the most part, teachers select the non-fiction they assign, as indicated in Table 19, and many of these come from the anthologies available to them in their schools. As Table 20 shows, they also tend to choose the technical or informational texts they assign (e.g., drivers manuals, style manuals, grammar handbooks, or college catalogues), drawing on a range of sources. However, many fewer teachers responded to Q27 (about the selection of technical or informational texts) than to Q23 (about the selection of literary non-fiction) and to Q11 (about the selection of major titles). For the questions addressed by Table 19 and Table 20, multiple responses were possible.

**Table 19: How are literary non-fiction works or authors selected?**

(Q23) Grade	Teacher	Department	Curriculum	Students	Other	Number of Classes
Grade 9	85%	29%	31%	24%	5%	207
Grade 10	86%	29%	32%	11%	5%	216
Grade 11	91%	25%	29%	12%	4%	234

**Table 20: How are major technical or informational texts selected?**

(Q27) Grade	Teacher	Department	Curriculum	Students	Number of Classes
Grade 9	77%	29%	32%	10%	130
Grade 10	77%	34%	28%	11%	147
Grade 11	77%	32%	26%	7%	137

## 6. Summary

The remnants of a once coherent high school literature and reading curriculum<sup>13</sup> can be discerned in the profile of the most frequently assigned titles in Arkansas (i.e., less complex works in grade 9, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Odyssey*, somewhat more complex Shakespeare in grade 10—*Julius Caesar*—and more complex works in grade 11 for the American literature course, such as *The Great Gatsby* and *The Scarlet Letter*). But the actual number of standards or honors classes in which these titles are assigned is, with only a few exceptions, very small.

Arkansas teachers seem to assign an enormous variety of other works for the vast middle of the state’s high school population, many of which are also mature literary or non-literary works, as can be seen in Appendix G. But it is not clear how easily a coherent curriculum can be worked out on the basis of a unique set of texts in each English class and at each grade level, chosen by the teacher or, in some cases, by their students, or by both. What (the approximately top third of) Arkansas students in the increasing number of AP English classes now offered in all high schools actually read can be determined only by examining the syllabi approved for these classes by the College Board. CB no longer requires teachers to use specific titles although they must adhere to broad criteria.

As for reading difficulty level, an analysis of the survey data suggests that students in standard or honors classes are, overall, not reading a more challenging group of major titles from grade 9 to grade 11. In large part, this may be due to the increasing range in reading skills in these classes and the enrollment of more capable students in the AP and Pre-AP classes.

A majority of Arkansas teachers use literature anthologies, but most of them teach fewer than half of the selections in them. These anthologies, which are not apt to be the most recent editions, seem to be the source of the major poets, short stories, and literary non-fiction they assign. However, teachers do seem to have a great deal of autonomy (in collaboration with colleagues) in what they choose to assign as major titles, poems, short stories, literary non-fiction selections, and technical or informational texts, however the latter are defined by them.

### B. How do teachers approach literary study and how much time do they allot to it?

These two questions were of paramount interest to us because of contextual factors influencing the amount of time English teachers might devote to literary study today and because of the inherent contradictions between the major pedagogical theories that have strongly influenced the preparation of English teachers and their professional development for several decades. We were particularly interested in finding out whether the contradictions between close reading/analytical approaches versus reader-response/personal approaches noted by Applebee in 1993 and Carnicelli in 2000 seemed to affect the teaching of literature in Arkansas. Fortunately, the survey responses provided us with a great deal of information on how Arkansas teachers of standard and honors classes approach the study of imaginative literature and literary nonfiction, how much time they devote to the study of imaginative literature and literary nonfiction, how they organize class discussions, and what kinds of assessments and writing projects they assign.

**1. Approaches to literary study**

Respondents were asked to listen to a short description of several approaches to teaching imaginative literature and literary non-fiction and to indicate which one “might best describe your approach” (Table 20 and Table 21). The categorical labels we provided roughly reflect the dominant critical approaches employed since the study of literature became a mandated part of the secondary curriculum in the 1880s (see Applebee & Purves, 1992). From that point until roughly the 1940s, a biographical/historical approach dominated, with a literary work seen chiefly as an embodiment of contemporary views of literary excellence and significant ideas, and its meaning a matter of personal impression. Beginning in the 1930s but developing dominance in the 1940s and remaining strong for three decades thereafter, a theory called New Criticism held sway in the teaching of literature. This theory sees the meaning of a literary work independent of its historical and cultural context and as something that emerges from a close analysis of the unity of the form and function of the work.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, reader-response theories, which focus on the reader’s response to a literary work and see the meaning of a work best determined by the reader’s personal experiences, were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s, with importance antecedents in the earlier work of I.A. Richards and Louise Rosenblatt. In the last third of the twentieth century, approaches came into play which again saw the meaning of a literary work determined by its historical and cultural context but also by the author’s ethnicity, gender, and biography. Among late-twentieth-century literary approaches, a common thread is a general belief, reflecting the notion of post-structuralism, that the meaning of a literary work is unstable and open to a possibly infinite variety of interpretations.

**Table 21: What might best describe your approach to teaching imaginative literature?**

(Q20) Grade	Close Reading or New Criticism	Biographical or Historical	Reader Response	Multicultural	Other	Don't Know	Number of Classes
Grade 9	26%	10%	38%	10%	10%	7%	240
Grade 10	32%	14%	35%	9%	6%	4%	253
Grade 11	35%	13%	36%	4%	8%	3%	248

**Table 22: What might best describe your approach to teaching literary non-fiction?**

(Q25) Grade	Close reading or New Criticism	Biographical or Historical	Reader Response	Multicultural	Other	Don't Know	Number of Courses
Grade 9	17%	25%	32%	8%	8%	11%	212
Grade 10	26%	23%	30%	8%	3%	9%	213
Grade 11	29%	31%	20%	6%	8%	5%	231

Since the survey provided the descriptions as well as the categorical labels for the various critical approaches, we assume that respondents understood “reader response” as a pedagogical approach that encourages students to determine the meaning of a text on the basis of their personal response to it, and “close reading or New Criticism” as an approach that encourages students to determine the meaning of a text on the basis of an analysis of what is in the text. We further assume that respondents understood “biographical or historical” as an approach that encourages students to locate the meaning of a text in the biography of the author or the history of the era in which he or she lived, and “multicultural” as an approach that encourages students to locate the meaning of a text in the experiences of the culturally non-dominant economic, social, or religious group the author identifies with and writes about. “Other” may comprise a range of other approaches that include contemporary post-structuralist approaches.

Two points are noteworthy about the results. First, in their responses about approaches to teaching literature, the respondents showed the “eclectic melding of reader- and text-centered

traditions” that troubled Applebee in his 1993 report but with very different weights. Keep in mind that teachers in our study were asked to select their one preferred approach to literary study, unlike those in Applebee's study who were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 the influence of different approaches to literary study on their pedagogy. In his study, 67 percent of the respondents rated very highly the influence of "reader-centered" theories on their teaching, while 50 percent rated very highly the influence of "text-centered" theories on their teaching. On the other hand, only about 31 percent of the teachers in this study indicated a preference for close reading or an analytical approach; the percentage is smaller if one includes their preferred approach to teaching literary non-fiction.

Another productive way to analyze our results is to place all the approaches in *three* groups based on the approach's view of the determinability of textual meaning and the primary focus of the reader's attention. One approach, close reading or New Criticism, teaches that the meaning of a text is determinable and stable and directs the reader's primary attention to its features and their contribution to plot, character, and/or theme. A second approach, comprising both a biographical or historical approach and a multicultural approach, also teaches that the meaning of a text is determinable and stable but directs the reader's primary attention not to the text but to the cultural and historical context for its theme, characters, or events and to the author's biography. A third approach, comprising various reader response approaches, teaches that the meaning of a text is indeterminable and variable and directs the reader's primary attention to something other than what is in the text. Using this classification scheme, and omitting the percentages for "other" and "don't know," we find the following percentages for approaches to teaching literature and literary non-fiction across grades 9, 10, and 11 in Arkansas:

Teaching literature:

- Determinable Meaning, Primary Attention to Text: 31%
- Determinable Meaning, Primary Attention not to Text: 20%
- Indeterminable Meaning, Primary Attention not to Text: 36.3%

Teaching literary non-fiction:

- Determinable Meaning, Primary Attention to Text: 24%
- Determinable Meaning, Primary Attention not to Text: 33.6%
- Indeterminable Meaning, Primary Attention not to Text: 27.3%

In over 56 percent of the classes in which literature was being taught and in almost 61 percent of the classes in which literary non-fiction was being taught, students' primary attention was generally directed to something other than what is the text itself.

The argument developed by the eminent literary critic Jane Gallop (2007) is instructive as we consider these data. Gallop explains her “worry about the fate of close reading,” which she believes is not widely taught and is “seldom theorized and much less defended” (p. 182). Gallop argues that “the most valuable thing English ever had to offer was the very thing that made us a discipline, that transformed us from cultured gentlemen to a profession: close reading” (p. 183). As she explains further, close reading, “learned through practice with literary texts, learned in literature classes, is a widely applicable skill, of value not just to scholars in other disciplines but to a wide range of students with many different futures” (p. 183). Gallop senses an irony in the demise of close reading at a time when teachers often speak of democratizing literary study. As she explains, “New Criticism was, at least in the classroom, a great leveler of cultural capital and thus suited the moment, after World War II, when American universities for the first time greeted large number of students who were not from the traditional elite. Where the old literary history favored students with cultured family backgrounds, close reading in the classroom tended to level

the playing field...Close reading made possible active learning,” offering an alternative to a “more authoritarian model of transmitting preprocessed knowledge” (p. 184).

Second, the preferred approaches to teaching literary non-fiction show interesting trends, especially in relation to teaching imaginative literature. The preference for using a biographical or historical approach is generally stronger in teaching literary non-fiction than in teaching imaginative literature: 25 percent of grade 9 classes emphasized a biographical or historical approach for teaching non-fiction, in contrast to 10 percent for teaching imaginative literature; 23 percent of grade 10 classes favored a biographical or historical approach for non-fiction, in contrast to 14 percent for literature; and 31 percent of grade 11 classes used a biographical or historical approach to non-fiction, in contrast to 13 percent for imaginative literature. The preference for using a reader response approach decreases from grade 9 through 10 to 11, as it did in teaching imaginative literature, but the decrease is more precipitous, from 32 to 20 percent. The preference for using close reading or New Criticism grows in the trend from grade 9 through 11, from 17 percent to 29 percent, but it never reaches the level it attained in the teaching of imaginative literature: 26 percent at grade 9, 32 percent at grade 10, and 35 percent at grade 11.

While it might seem sensible to assume that in teaching non-fiction one tries to help students to determine what central point or thesis a text develops and how its organization, syntax, diction, imagery, and figurative language contribute to that development, in relatively few English classes in Arkansas is that the case. There are many plausible and not mutually exclusive explanations for these results: (1) English teachers nationally—not only in Arkansas—have had little pre-service or in-service instruction in how to read and teach non-fiction analytically (see Jolliffe, 2008); (2) English teachers have been discouraged in pre-service or in-service instruction from reading and teaching imaginative literature or literary non-fiction texts analytically; (3) English teachers have unintentionally generalized the use of a reader response approach for imaginative literature to literary non-fiction; (4) English teachers have not experienced a model of close analytical reading of literature in their own undergraduate English or other humanities courses; and (5) English teachers do not have enough time in an era of state standards, assessments, and accountability to teach their own students how to read analytically.

## 2. Time devoted to literary study

Respondents were asked to indicate an average for the amount of class time they would spend per year teaching book-length fiction and non-fiction. As Table 23 shows, over three-quarter reported spending 30 percent *or less* of their time teaching a book-length work of fiction. Table 24 shows that the vast majority spend 10 percent or less of their time on literary non-fiction.

**Table 23: What percentage of class time do you spend on book-length fiction in this class?**

(Q12) Grade	1 to 10 percent	11-20 percent	20-30 percent	31-40 percent	41-50 percent	51-70 percent	71-100 percent	Number of Classes
Grade 9	27%	28%	18%	5%	10%	4%	8%	152
Grade 10	35%	28%	16%	6%	6%	3%	6%	173
Grade 11	41%	28%	12%	6%	4%	5%	4%	167

**Table 24: What percentage of class time do you spend on book-length non-fiction in this class?**

(Q24) Grade	Less than 5%	5 to 10%	11 to 15%	Over 15%	Number of Classes
Grade 9	29%	41%	11%	19%	115
Grade 10	29%	52%	10%	10%	105
Grade 11	33%	46%	13%	9%	120

### 3. The assignment of reading for homework

Most of the teachers—81 percent in grade 9, 77 percent in grade 10, and 80 percent in grade 11—reported that they assigned reading to be done as homework (Table 25). As Table 26 indicates, most teachers assigned fewer than 40 pages of reading to be done as homework per week.

**Table 25: Do you assign reading to be done at home?**

(Q16) Grade	Yes	No	Number of Classes
Grade 9	81%	19%	240
Grade 10	77%	23%	256
Grade 11	80%	20%	249

**Table 26: About how many pages per week?**

(Q17) Grade	1 to 10 pages	11 to 20 pages	21 to 30 pages	31 to 40 pages	41 to 50 pages	51 to 70 pages	71 to 100 pages	Over 100 pages	Number of Classes
Grade 9	21%	19%	13%	8%	11%	6%	13%	9%	160
Grade 10	13%	19%	13%	11%	12%	7%	16%	9%	171
Grade 11	18%	18%	12%	8%	14%	9%	16%	5%	167

### 4. Organizing class discussions

Respondents were asked to indicate how they typically organize class discussions. Multiple responses were possible.

**Table 27: How do you typically organize discussion in this class?**

(Q13) Grade	Whole Class	Small Group	Prepared Teacher Questions	Student Questions	Other	Number of Classes
Grade 9	96%	67%	82%	68%	14%	239
Grade 10	96%	63%	84%	67%	13%	251
Grade 11	92%	66%	83%	62%	14%	250

As Table 27 shows, almost all teachers at all grade levels organize discussion on a whole-class basis. Most also use teacher-prepared questions (often provided by their literature anthologies or supplementary curriculum resources). However, whole-class discussion is not necessarily preceded by a teacher lecture (a frequent interpretation of this strategy). Focus groups teachers reported devoting significant amounts of time to reading literary texts aloud before class discussion. They also frequently mentioned using "reader or writer workshop" methods (not always by choice) which require whole-class mini-lessons on reading and writing skills before small group discussion. It is therefore possible that reading aloud and conducting mini-lessons on skills were included under the rubric of whole-class discussion, especially because two-thirds of the classes at all grade levels also use student-generated questions and small groups for discussion. (See Daniels, 2004, for a description of how small literature discussion groups may work.) We have no way of knowing how often small groups are used in these classes, but they are a mandated pedagogical strategy in schools under contract with an intervention program as part of their School Improvement Plan, and, as focus group teachers pointed out, little analytical reading takes place and can take place in student-led literature discussion groups.

### 5. Types of assessments and writing assignments

Respondents were asked to indicate what forms of assessment they employ and what types of writing assignments they give, both in-class and out-of-class, including the assignment of a research paper (Tables 28, 29, 30, and 31). Again, multiple responses were possible.

**Table 28: What forms of assessment do you employ?**

(Q14) Grade	Book Reports	Book Reviews	Oral Reports	Research Paper	PowerPoint	Exams	Other	Number of Classes
Grade 9	44%	45%	58%	60%	55%	92%	32%	238
Grade 10	39%	41%	59%	67%	52%	93%	26%	251
Grade 11	37%	43%	59%	76%	61%	94%	30%	249

**Table 29: Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly...in or outside of class...in response to assignments?**

(Q15) Grade	Journal	Essays	Quizzes	Other	Number of Classes
Grade 9	68%	95%	81%	24%	241
Grade 10	67%	94%	77%	21%	252
Grade 11	69%	98%	79%	20%	249

**Table 30: Do you require a major research paper?**

(Q18) Grade	Yes	No	Number of Classes
Grade 9	52%	48%	239
Grade 10	62%	38%	256
Grade 11	80%	20%	250

**Table 31: How much total class time do you allot for it?**

(Q19) Grade	Less than 1 hour	1 to 4 hours	5 to 7 hours	8 to 10 hours	11 to 13 hours	14 or more hours	Number of Classes
Grade 9	16%	27%	21%	15%	10%	11%	96
Grade 10	13%	23%	17%	22%	14%	10%	115
Grade 11	15%	21%	17%	24%	12%	10%	146

Three trends in these data strike us as interesting. First, fewer than half the respondents required book reviews. In contrast to the traditional book report, book reviews may provide students the opportunity to develop an interpretive or evaluative argument about a literary work.

Second, there is a growing emphasis on the research paper from grade 9 to grade 10 to grade 11, as suggested in Table 30. Many educators perceive the research paper to be a staple of college-level English/language arts instruction, so requiring it as students get closer to their college years makes sense to them. In 2009, 63.4 percent of all Arkansas high school graduates matriculated in a two- or four-year college in the state; we presume a relatively small percentage of students enrolled in out-of-state colleges and universities. Thus, while the state average is below the national average of 67.4 percent matriculation in college after high school, nearly two-thirds of all Arkansas high school students can be considered “college bound” (Arkansas Senate, 2009).

Third, the strong showing for PowerPoint presentations as a form of assessment or writing assignment might be attributed to an increasing emphasis on technology and media literacy in Arkansas schools. A PowerPoint presentation might be considered among the simpler, more elementary methods of demonstrating facility with media and technology use.

## 6. Summary

Reader response and cultural/historical/biographical approaches seem to dominate high school teachers’ pedagogy for literary study in standard and honors courses. Using Arthur Applebee’s percentages in Table 7.4 on page 123 in his 1993 report as a baseline for comparison, we found a



marked decrease in close analytical reading from the late 1980s to the present. In his study, teachers rated the influence of different approaches to literary study on classroom pedagogy and 50 percent gave close reading a very high rating, while 67 percent gave reader response a very high rating. In the Arkansas study, however, which asked respondents to indicate their preferred approach to literary study, a large majority of teachers at each grade level indicated a preference for non-analytical approaches—approaches other than close reading—and even more so for teaching literary non-fiction. Focus group teachers in fact suggested that close reading was unlikely to be taught in other than Pre-AP and AP classes.

Using James Squire and Roger Applebee's 1968 percentages as a baseline for comparing the amount of instructional time devoted to literary study, we also found a sharp decrease in the time devoted to literary study—from 52 percent to about 30 percent or less. Moreover, a scheme for classifying the primary focus of student attention in the various approaches English teachers use for literary study suggests that students' primary attention was apt to be directed to something other than the content and features of the text itself in about two-thirds of the classes in our study, whether they were studying literature or literary non-fiction.

With respect to writing activities and forms of assessment, a majority of classes at all three grade levels surveyed also use small group work and student questions as well as teacher (or anthology) prepared questions for class discussion. A large majority of classes also engage frequently in journal writing, as well as writing essays and taking quizzes, and engage in a major research paper by their junior year.

#### **IV. Themes, Topics, and Recommendations from the Focus Groups**

##### **A. Teachers' Themes and Topics**

###### **1. Excessive stress on less able or unmotivated students leading to skewed state tests**

Comments in this section come from focus group meetings in Pine Bluff, Arkadelphia, Beebe, and Little Rock. According to the teachers, their students may "range from grade 2 to grade 12 in a class" in reading ability. Another said: "Most in grade 11 are at a grade 8 reading level." Although all want less able students to improve, teachers perceive an excessive stress on them—and to the detriment of the content of the state's literacy tests. These tests do not assess literary knowledge or stress literary analysis, which leads, in their eyes, to the use of less challenging works or a de-emphasis on literary study altogether.

Because state tests do not assess what students know about literature or stress literary analysis, "there is no need to critically analyze literature." Moreover, "We get into trouble for [giving] Fs, so we use less challenging works of literature." Participants noted that the pressure their administrators feel when their district or school fails to achieve adequate yearly progress gets passed on to them: "If teachers raise the bar, they fear they will get in trouble with the administration, which claims it is the teachers' problem if the students don't do well." "There is pressure on the teachers to pass the kids, not on the kids to pass the course." As a result, "No longer can we choose to teach what we love. We've changed from book-based, theme-based, literature-based [teaching] to strategy-based" [teaching]. "In secondary schools, because we have not been successful in getting schools off school improvement," "my job is to "teach them to read, teach them how to read instructional manuals, teach them how to succeed in life, how to fill out forms."

## **2. Mandates to cater to unmotivated or less able readers by means of self-selected texts**

Comments in this section come from focus group meetings in Little Rock, Harrison, Beebe, and Arkadelphia. "Before, schools considered what kids needed to know for college," even though "a majority will not go on to college, or, [if they do], last only a year." However, "the drop-out rate is high: boys can make good money in oil/gas fields without graduating from high school, and girls get pregnant or just drop out." As a result of policies aimed at improving the reading and writing skills of academically unmotivated or less able students, teachers feel constrained by intervention programs that mandate catering to these students by means of texts pitched well below the grade level at which some of their peers could read and by allowing them to choose what they want to read from a suggested list or a classroom set of easy books. "LitLab says 'get them to read anything,' though not all teachers agree. Students need challenges." "Kids read them but they are not improving their vocabulary or comprehension." Most mandated books or lists of books are chiefly at grades 4-6 in readability level. "The authors America's Choice uses are: Gary Soto, Virginia Hamilton, Walter Dean Myers, Robert Frost, Zora Neale Hurston, and John Steinbeck—they tell you to have class sets of specific works." "Currently, we are suffering from the 'get students to read more no matter what it is' drive." The push for quantity over quality has arrested the development of all our students."

Teachers did express contradictory attitudes about this strategy. Whether the lists or classroom sets of books are adaptations of classics or simply contemporary reading materials, many teachers tended to agree they should be offered to students as individual choices. "Allow choice," "Stay flexible and attune to what students like," "Cater to the interests of students," "Let them read what interests them,"

## **3. Mandated pedagogical strategies incompatible with analytical reading**

Comments in this section come from meetings in Arkadelphia, West Helena, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff. Teachers expressed frustration with the pedagogy mandated by "the many different intervention programs assaulting them." They recognize that required small group work is not compatible with teacher-led close reading approaches. For example, both America's Choice (AC) and Smart Step Literacy Lab (LitLab), the two most frequently mentioned programs, foster small group work or workshop approaches. Both are geared to students with the poorest reading skills ("for students reading at the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade levels") and are not perceived as sufficiently developmental for students close to grade level in reading (i.e., the student who is not in an AP class). "AC is aimed at the least proficient kids: it homogenizes kids to fit the lowest standards. It holds the better students back. There is no exception for the more proficient pre-AP students. Every student does the same lower level program." Another commented that "it was scripted even to the point of telling you when to smile." However, some teachers like that: "I'm OK with it being scripted." "AC prescribes how class time should be used, e.g., 10 minutes for whole class discussion, 45 minutes for small peer group interaction. Faculty acts as coaches."

## **4. Reading aloud as a strategy to address low reading skills or unprepared students**

Comments in this section come from focus group meetings in Pine Bluff, Beebe, Harrison, and West Helena. The reasons for employing this strategy varied: "Reading aloud can be a way of interesting students in a text or focusing their attention at the beginning of an hour." "It can help them decipher difficult texts." "Teachers are pressured to be 'in front' of the class (rather than grading at desk); reading aloud fulfills that requirement (from an administrator)." Others viewed it as a response to their students' disinterest in reading for homework: "Even in pre-AP courses, kids won't read at home." Apparently, many students won't complete reading homework, so in-class reading, often in the form of reading aloud, is employed as a substitute to enable the teacher to hold a class discussion of the text.

In a 2010 *Education Week* article, “Reading Aloud to Teens Gains Favor among Teachers,” Mary Ann Zehr presents results of a survey showing that 344 of 476 respondents (high school teachers) read aloud to their students. Respondents gave four reasons for reading aloud to their students: to further a love of reading, to build attention and interest in a topic, to model correct and fluent oral reading, and to expose students to texts otherwise unread. Our data suggest two other reasons: a principal’s pressure and an instructional recommendation in America’s Choice’s program. It is not clear how widespread this strategy is and how much instructional time the teacher’s oral reading consumes. Nor is it clear whether all of the students in such high school English classes benefit from the experience, especially those who do their assigned reading as homework.

##### **5. Focus on comprehension strategies, not analytical reading, to address low reading skills**

Comments in this section come from focus group meetings in Farmington, Harrison, and Walnut Ridge. Teachers explained that they spend considerable time and energy simply getting students to read and comprehend texts and, consequently, relatively little time teaching students to analyze texts. Several reported that they need to “catch up” the students’ reading abilities so they would be able to perform well on state tests. To achieve this “catching up,” teachers rely on such tactics as “sitting with students and reading with them, paired reading, oral reading, and many [other] comprehension strategies.” Close reading, “even though it requires scientific precision and rigor,” is seen as having “no immediate value” for students in regular English classes. “Outside of AP classes, there is little active reading (e.g., ask questions, visualize, or look for literary devices); it’s mainly comprehension strategies.”

##### **6. Reliance on skills approach and personal response because of time constraints**

Comments in this section come from focus group meetings in Farmington, West Helena, Little Rock, Harrison, and Beebe. Teachers argued that the need to address all the state’s objectives and the dictates of intervention programs imposed on them for “school improvement,” lead not just to less time for close reading of significant works but to a reliance on personal response and skills-based approaches to teaching reading. In these approaches, the specific works of literature taught “are less important than skills;” teachers “can use any text” to teach skills. “Novels are used to teach skills because the emphasis is on skills.” “The book is not important. You can teach a skill with anything, so getting them interested is the objective.”

The strategy most often mentioned for implementing a personalized skills-based approach to literary study was some variety of a literature circle (Daniels, 1994), referred to by the teachers as “literacy circles,” “literary circles,” “book clubs,” or “readers’ clubs.” “Literary Circles are *skills driven* rather than *literature driven*; mastery of skills is more critical than reading specific literature.” This small group approach holds students responsible for generating and answering their own questions about the texts they read (although some focus group teachers indicated that they provide their students with the questions). In theory, less able students are guided by more able peers: “poor students” are expected to “rise to expectations and learn from their peers,” as one teacher put it. However, “for a group of poor readers, nothing gets done” and “small groups are harder for the teacher to monitor or direct in in-depth analysis.”

This strategy may be recommended by some intervention programs and over-used by many teachers because it is easier than teaching: “Kids’ attitudes are defiant; it is not fun to teach defiant kids—so teachers don’t try as hard.” Whether or not it is easier for teachers, the strategy has serious limitations. “Kids coming into AP classes from non-Pre-AP classes are at first clueless about how to analyze a poem or do close reading.” As a teacher noted, “AP and Pre-AP classes tend to be whole-class instruction; whereas traditional/regular/standard classes are more likely taught in groups.”

### **7. No authentic English curriculum possible in the context of skills-oriented standards/tests**

Comments in this section come from focus group meetings in Little Rock, Harrison, Arkadelphia, and West Helena. Teachers who have been trained to offer a curriculum encompassing literature, composition, and language study are left confused by the myriad skills-oriented standards they must address. "Should we teach content versus skills, and if so, how much of each?" "What body of literary knowledge and genre knowledge is expected?" "What should be done with classics?" "Who defines them?" Is it necessary to study the literary movements that have shaped English literature and language?" "If kids are to learn to analyze, will any text do?" "How does one deal with the question of relevance?" "Perhaps, if foreign students in colleges have learned English classics, then we should keep them. Our students should be better informed and culturally literate." "We would like a reading list of what colleges teach and what they expect."

However, the teachers sense that curricular decisions are being shaped by external forces. Some commented, for example, on "literacy coaches and administrators" who don't know "what is going on in the classrooms" and often "flip-flop on policies." Others noted they felt "controlled by the curriculum map" and by their district's "Total Instructional Alignment" document that is seen as "stressing skills rather than content."

### **8. Analytical reading of quality texts possible mainly in AP and Pre-AP literature classes**

Comments in this section come from meetings in Arkadelphia, Beebe, Harrison, and Walnut Ridge. "Pre-AP classes differ from regular classes with more in-depth reading, more writing, some choice; right now there are no guidelines (up to the teacher) although College Board has pre-AP guides." "Even students who are not prepared are encouraged into the AP courses because they are better courses with fewer constrictions; these students struggle but get better readings." "In some schools, there are no limits to entry into AP. Kids sign up because of self-motivation—peers, college, parents, and grades are weighted. They just have to pass Benchmark, and they are pushed into AP." "Kids coming in from non-Pre-AP classes are at first clueless about how to analyze a poem or do close reading; they take longer to 'catch on' but they all end at about the same level." "AP courses come as a shock to students who by the 11<sup>th</sup> grade are still reading and writing at a 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade level." "Outside of AP classes, there is little active reading (e.g., ask questions, visualize, or look for literary devices); it's mainly comprehension strategies." "AP and Pre-AP classes tend to be whole-class instruction, whereas traditional/regular/standard classes are more likely taught in groups." "Even AP is not wholly free from the grasp of *America's Choice*, but the AP syllabus supersedes AC and frees AP from *America's Choice*." "Students actually do better in AP Lit than the AP Language. The AP Lit exam requires critical close reading and is actually easier. AP Language exam requires rhetorical theory and analysis, and teachers are not prepared to teach this."

## **B. Teachers' Recommendations**

### **1. Develop stronger reading programs in elementary and middle schools.**

Teachers perceive that many students in their classes are unprepared to read the material for their high school courses. "If kids are not reading in elementary school or middle school, then high schools can't change water into wine."

### **2. Stress enhanced vocabulary development in elementary and middle schools.**

Most of the focus-group teachers believe the vocabulary of their students is poor and needs addressing in earlier grades as well as in the secondary grades. One teacher maintained that the teaching of vocabulary "currently stops in sixth grade in any systematic way."

### **3. Require separate reading classes from K to 8 or 10**

Reading instruction tends to drop out of the curriculum by grade 6. Many focus group teachers called for targeted instruction in reading for struggling readers through at least the eighth grade; some recommended that it continue through tenth. “English is too vast,” noted one teacher, calling for two separate courses per grade level, one taught by English teachers, the other by trained reading teachers.

### **4. Reduce the number of teacher preparations per day.**

Especially in small rural high schools, teachers are required to prepare five, or in some cases, six different classes a day—not five or six different sections of the same course, but five or six discrete courses. This workload is exacerbated by what they perceive as “inadequate time to plan” and the frequent requirement that they spend their planning time “on data and target tests.”

### **5. Provide more appealing non-fiction for boys.**

As the survey showed, not much non-fiction is taught in Arkansas high schools. Focus group teachers argued that good non-fiction prose might be particularly effective as a way to “hook” and interest young male readers.

### **6. Give more attention to “regular” students in “regular” classes.**

Teachers perceive that No Child Left Behind’s aim to make poor readers and special education populations proficient, and Arkansas’ goal to increase the number of students taking AP or Pre-AP courses, have left all students between these extremes in classes (standard or honors) that focus predominantly on the lowest-achieving students in these classes in an effort to get them to pass the state’s tests. All students “must be challenged to think,” one teacher put it.

### **7. Change the state’s English language arts standards and ELA tests.**

Teachers perceive that the state’s current assessments “limit what students read and what we teach.” Many see the Grade 11 literacy test as particularly in need of revision; they consider it “a reading rate test, nothing more.” “Tests drive our courses,” one teacher noted, but “preparing students for college doesn’t enter my mind. I’m focused on the Target Test, benchmark preparation, and the 11<sup>th</sup> grade literacy exam.” Another teacher offered that perhaps she and her colleagues “should concentrate on ACT preparation rather than the Literacy Exam.” Several suggested using excerpts from well-recognized novels on the tests as part of students’ cultural education.

## **V. Special Influences on Curriculum and Instruction in the English Class**

### **A. Smart Step Literacy Lab**

The Smart Step Literacy Lab (SSLL) was the most frequently mentioned program in the eight focus group meetings we held across the state in September and October, 2009. We heard both positive and negative remarks about it. A librarian claimed that, since her grades 7-12 school adopted the Literacy Lab approach, “there is actually an increase in reading...verifiable by library certificates [numbers of books checked out per year].” A teacher said that she and her colleagues, “...consider themselves fortunate for having the opportunity” to work with the program and its founder. However, although some teachers at these meetings also believed there was an increase in reading after adopting this approach, they and others questioned what they perceived as its goal. One teacher asserted that all “Lit Lab” wants is to “get [the students] to read anything,” but that this approach doesn’t address the issue that “students need challenges.” Because of the very mixed remarks about this reading program in our meetings, we decided it would be useful to

provide information on it before raising questions in the Discussion/Conclusion section about its role in the English language arts curriculum in Arkansas.

Referred to as the “Arkansas Method,” by one teacher, the SSSL program is supposedly designed to help teachers to create classroom environments conducive to literacy development through their use of reading and writing workshop methods.<sup>15</sup> This program, offered through a partnership between Harding University and the Arkansas Department of Education, is defined clearly in its published brochure:

...a rigorous 14-day staff development designed for all teachers, media specialists, and principals of students in grades 4-12. The training covers a two-year period. The seven days in the first year cover the material and research needed for teachers to implement a reading workshop environment in their classrooms. Those seven days address the need for creating engaging literate environments in classrooms, as well as instruction in motivating fluency and in comprehension strategies. The seven days in the second year are designed to instruct teachers to use assessment as the driver of instruction and to implement writing workshops in their classrooms, along with vocabulary and word study instruction.<sup>16</sup>

Ken Stamatis, professor of mid-level literacy at Harding University in Searcy, started the program in 2002 to coincide with the state’s adoption of a Smart Step professional development plan for teachers. As noted above, teachers are trained in 14 days over a two-year period. Participants read a variety of educational literature and research as part of the training and hear several authors of children’s and young adult literature. These teachers then return to their schools to create model “lab classrooms” where students, with guidance from their teachers, choose and read as many as 25 books per year. This creates a language arts classroom where 25 different books are being read simultaneously, and common skills are being taught to address these 25 different books.

There are several questions about this program that need to be critically examined. First, can common skills be taught, and taught effectively, in such a context? A classroom of students reading 25 different books creates a situation where it is not possible for the teacher to address reading strategies or literary elements of relevance to each student in a rigorous and challenging manner. A literature teacher prepares grade 9 students to read *Romeo and Juliet* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* in very different ways. This means that in a SSSL classroom, the content and literary craft in each of 25 novels being read must be interpreted by each student independently.

Second, can the books recommended by SSSL contribute to each students' reading development? What students read is critical, but, according to the teachers in the focus groups, most of the books are at about a grade 5 reading level, a judgment which the use of the ATOS for Books readability formula confirms. While teachers may provide some guidance on the books that students read, how much guidance they actually give is unknown. SSSL's recommended list of titles (*So Many Books, So Little Time*) consists almost wholly of young adult literature written in the past few years: e.g., *The Juvie Three*, 2008 (RL: 4.9); *Revenge of the Cheerleaders*, 2007 (RL:5.0); *Skeleton Creek*, 2009 (RL: 4.8); *The Dreadful Revenge of Ernest Gallen*, 2008 (RL: 4.1; and *Death by Bikini*, 2008 (RL: 4.4). Titles such as these will almost certainly stimulate adolescents to read. But the goal of independent quantity reading seems to have distracted teachers from attention to the quality of what students are reading and how quality reading experiences can move students forward educationally to become literate members of our democracy.

While widespread across Arkansas, the SSSL approach has never been addressed in education research. In an age of evidence-based programs and practices in literacy instruction, the SSSL brochure begins by directly addressing the total absence of an evidence base.

The goal of the project is to fully implement the model. It is not to be used as an 'addition to' piece for teachers. Though no controlled quantitative experimental study has been conducted, evidence from the observation of the large number of fully implementing schools and classrooms shows significant increases in student achievement in the areas of fluency, comprehension, motivation, and vocabulary development on measured state Norm-Referenced and Criterion-Referenced Tests.<sup>17</sup>

A search of the major databases containing education research—ERIC, Ebsco, ProQuest—confirmed what SSSL admitted: no study has been published on SSSL, whether experimental, quasi-experimental, qualitative, or otherwise. Although this program has been whole-heartedly endorsed by the Arkansas Department of Education, its effectiveness remains untested by independent sources and unproven. Why this is so is a mystery. We are especially troubled by the statement that schools must “fully implement the model,” followed by an admission that no educational research has been completed or published on it, especially since it has the state’s unqualified endorsement.

SSLL places most of its emphasis on the idea that if students are engaged in reading all the time, schools will become more literate places, and test scores will improve. This is an unproven assumption. It is more likely the case that students will improve as readers if they are asked to tackle increasingly more rigorous and challenging texts. But if students, especially in grades 9-12, continue reading books only at the fifth or sixth grade level, their growth as readers will be stunted. The state is in dire need of improving students’ reading abilities and scores, but is this kind of a program, with this kind of a reading list, the best way to do it? We are confused about why a state would fully endorse the propagation of a literacy program that doesn’t meet the standards for evidence-based programs set by the International Reading Association, has no published evaluative studies to its name, and readily admits that shortcoming on its brochure for teachers.

## **B. America's Choice**

In 2006, the state contracted with America’s Choice (AC), a national for-profit organization, to turn around low-performing schools or districts in Arkansas at the cost of \$6.2 million of federal funds. The contract remains in place as part of the state’s Smart Accountability plan for schools in School Improvement Year 3 and beyond. A number of teachers in the focus group meetings called our attention to the influence of AC on both the content of the high school English curriculum and teachers’ instructional strategies. These teachers’ comments ranged from highly positive (e.g., "AC teaches kids basic study skills and how to organize;" "schools that have used it for four years have seen improvement, especially Little Rock and Pulaski school districts that are heavily into it;" "AC is not so bad because kids need structure and do test a bit better") to highly negative (e.g., "the brighter kids are 'left out' because programs like AC impose their teaching model on all"). Thus, as with Smart Step Literacy Lab, we decided to gather more information on America's Choice's program and work in Arkansas. In this section, we describe this organization using information on its website and then summarize the main points these teachers made.

AC's School Design is a K-12 comprehensive school model designed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). Its stated goal is to "make sure that all but the most severely handicapped students reach an internationally benchmarked standard of achievement in English language arts and mathematics by the time that they graduate." To implement the program over a three-year period, each school "must assign personnel as coaches." Thus, implementation of the program requires additional personnel as well as new and ongoing costs for a school or district. The following description of AC's Readers Workshop appears in a 2002 evaluation of the way AC "literacy workshops" were being implemented, sponsored by NCEE.

**Readers Workshop** is structured to begin with a whole-class meeting in which the class might do a shared reading and have a mini-lesson in a 15-20 minute time period. The mini-lesson can cover phonics-based skills, decoding word analysis, comprehension skills, or procedures. This mini-lesson is usually followed by a period of independent/guided reading and/or reading conference period in which a number of activities like partner reading or book talks occur for about 45 minutes. In independent reading, students focus on reading appropriately leveled texts for enjoyment and understanding. Partner reading allows students to work with slightly more difficult texts, practice reading aloud, and model "accountable talk" and "think-aloud" strategies. Reading aloud provides an opportunity for the teacher or other proficient reader to introduce authors or topics and model reading for the whole class. Shared reading allows the teacher to work with smaller groups of readers on reading strategies. Readers workshop may end with a book talk in which students share reactions to books read independently or to a book read aloud to the group.

A review of the research literature shows mixed support for AC. Evaluative studies carried out in the mid-2000s by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) found statistically significant effects for various components of the program in relation to the extent to which it was implemented by teachers.<sup>18</sup> But these statistically significant effects, a common finding in research studies using large numbers of students, were rarely practically significant. It is common knowledge that statistically significant positive effects for a new program in quasi-experimental studies using large numbers of students do not necessarily translate into meaningful increases in student achievement in reading or mathematics. A comprehensive examination of the research on secondary reading programs by Robert Slavin and his associates published in 2008 (Slavin et al., 2008) found "no qualifying studies" on AC's Ramp-Up to Literacy program. Criteria that eliminated studies on Ramp-Up to Literacy for further examination were (1) use of randomized or matched control groups, (2) a study lasting at least 12 weeks, and/or (3) valid achievement measures that were independent of experimental treatments.

More positive was a study CPRE released in 2009 (CPRE, 2009) comparing three models of comprehensive school reform programs (Accelerated Schools Project, America's Choice, and Success for All) that had been implemented from 1999-2004 in 115 elementary schools across the country. The researchers found "statistically significant differences in patterns of achievement growth for students in AC schools in the upper grades. ... From the beginning of third grade to the end of fifth grade ... students in AC schools, on average, scored an additional nine to 12 points on the reading comprehension outcome, depending on the model adjustments."

The researchers accounted for these changes by noting AC's emphasis on "a significant amount of guidance and press for instructional standardization as part of its instructional improvement strategy... not by emphasizing scripted instructional routines, but rather by encouraging development of strong instructional leadership in schools..." However, they also noted that this



emphasis on standardization and leadership "worked against the formation of strong professional communities and also decreased the press for innovation and autonomy in AC schools."

What seemed to account for AC's positive effects at the elementary school level in this study may be exactly what arouses a great deal of hostility to it at the high school level in Arkansas, as well as a lack of results. According to a focus group participant from a school district under contract to AC, "Someone asked the AC representative if any of the secondary schools under their management had gotten off School Improvement. He said they had made gains but none had [gotten off School Improvement]."<sup>19</sup>

Participants at the focus group meetings made the following negative comments:

- "America's Choice is aimed at the least proficient kids—the program homogenizes kids to fit the lowest standards. It holds the better students back. There is no exception for the more proficient Pre-AP students. Every student does the same lower level program. This is an issue with teachers. Parents don't seem to know or complain about this."
- "The consultant directs what teachers will do and what teachers will be using."
- "AC expects students to choose 25 books per year but excludes difficult classics right away."
- "Programs like AC impose their teaching model on all"
- "Even AP is not wholly free from the grasp of America's Choice, but the AP Syllabus supersedes AC. The College Board frees AP teachers but they are still urged to use [AC] methods."
- "For AC, pedagogy is more important than content."
- "In an AC setting, courses are designed specifically for kids reading at the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade level in an attempt to get them reading at grade level."
- "No longer can teachers choose to teach what they love—we've changed from book-based, theme-based, literature-based to strategy-based."

However, some teachers or supervisors in schools districts with large numbers of low-performing students approve of AC's de-emphasis on mature literary works and of what they view as its scripted nature.

- "Before, schools considered what kids needed to know for college but a majority will not go on to college, or last only a year—so no need to critically analyze literature. Students need to know how to succeed in life, how to fill out forms. We must teach them to read, not analyze—it's not about the books, it's about life skills. We should teach them to read instructional manuals, they are more difficult than novels. We should get rid of the classics."
- "I'm ok with it being scripted. It is scripted to the degree that it even tells you when to smile."

Lack of significant results above the elementary school level is not just an Arkansas phenomenon. AC was a turnaround partner with the public schools in Holyoke, Massachusetts from 2006-2008 under an initial \$2 million contract with the Massachusetts Department of Education (MDE). It implemented its Ramp-Up Math and Ramp-Up Literacy curricula in six schools, while two under-performing schools received an additional 30 days of support from AC coaches. As the MDE put it in its Race to the Top application in January 2010, "results were mixed." As noted by a local reporter: "Few improvements were seen when the schools tried the America's Choice math program so that was ended (DeForge, 2010). In sum, given the lack of well-designed studies and evidence for its high school reading program (Slavin et al, 2008), it America's Choice does not

appear to warrant the contracts it has with so many secondary schools in Arkansas and the contractual right to impose its pedagogical views on all the teachers in these schools.

## **VI. Discussion and Conclusions**

Much has changed in the past four decades in the content of the high school literature curriculum for students in standard or honors courses, to judge by the actual frequencies in our lists, not their profiles. The results of our survey confirm what was visible 15 years ago (Stotsky, 1995). The most frequently mentioned titles on these lists (usually described as the "classics") are assigned in only a small percentage of courses. These low frequencies may be interpreted to indicate that little is left of a once coherent and progressively more challenging literature curriculum with respect to two of its major functions: to acquaint students with the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people and to develop an understanding and use of the language needed for authentic college coursework. It is possible that many titles from the large pool of individual titles mentioned by survey respondents can serve some of the same functions, but it is not clear how easily this could take place given the almost idiosyncratic nature of what is assigned across classes and schools.

How much has changed in just the past 20 years alone can be seen by the comparison in Table 12 showing the top ten titles across grade levels in the Arkansas survey with the ten most frequently assigned titles by school in more than 50% of the public schools Arthur Applebee surveyed in the late 1980s. The profiles are somewhat similar, but the numbers behind the frequencies tell the real tale. Because his study included all the different types of English classes in grades 9-12, not just standard and honors classes in grades 9-11, and his unit of analysis was the school, it could not identify a profile of what any one student might have read from grade 9 to grade 12. In contrast, the Arkansas survey addressed what students in the middle third have been assigned to read. It is unlikely that the large differences in percentages from 1989 to 2009 can be explained by just the differences in types of classes covered and in the unit of analysis. It is more likely that most high school students today do not read what their counterparts two decades ago read

One might ask what difference that makes. Teachers and students now exercise their preferences and perhaps, one might argue, their preferences are just as educational as the assigned curriculum was years ago. However, there is no evidence of any kind to suggest that these changes have led to improved reading and writing by the average high school graduate, nationwide or in Arkansas. Indeed, our analysis of the level of reading difficulty of the titles assigned in Arkansas suggests that students in standard or honors classes are, overall, not reading a more challenging group of major titles from grade 9 to grade 11. In large part, this may be due to the increasing range in reading skills in these classes. This generalization would appear to be supported by the high rate at which "traditional" students (those within a year of graduation from high school) are placed in remedial reading or English classes at the post-secondary level in Arkansas institutions of higher education.

As reported by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education in January 2010, the remedial rate for first-time college entrants in mathematics, English, and reading in 2009 rose to 54.6 percent, up 3.3 percent from the 51.3 percent rate in 2008.<sup>20</sup> For the 2007-2008 academic year 42 percent of the freshmen in community colleges needed remediation in Reading while 48 percent needed remediation in English.<sup>21</sup> For four-year colleges, the figures were 21 percent in Reading and 23 percent in English. Such high rates suggest that the state's students have not been well served by their high school English curriculum. Most of these students were likely part of the middle third in high school because it is reasonable to assume that those completing and passing either the AP Literature and Composition course or the AP Language and Composition course were less likely

to have been placed in a remedial course after admission to either a two-year or a four-year post-secondary institution.

Based on what teachers attending the focus groups said, it seems that Arkansas teachers want to teach significant works or authors in their literary and civic heritage. They would likely welcome guidelines for middle school reading programs that would better prepare students for reading culturally and historically important works in high school. Students' comprehension of the mature uses of the English language cannot be developed without exposure to the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people in a coherent and progressively more challenging reading and literature curriculum through the grades (see Chall, 1983, for a description of the major stages of reading development beyond "learning to read"). Students are most unlikely to develop comprehension of the mature uses of the English language from a steady diet of popular young adult fiction, as suggested by the many differences between popular fiction and literature noted by Jeanne Chall and her associates in their work on readability and levels of reading difficulty (Chall et al, 1996).

The more important finding of this study, however, is not the texts that are (or are not) assigned by teachers or chosen by students in grades 9, 10, and 11 or in the middle grades. It is the pedagogy they use. Reader response and cultural/historical/biographical approaches seem to dominate teachers' pedagogy for literary study in standard and honors courses, in tandem with a compulsory focus on culture-free skills imposed by state standards, state assessments, and the intervention and other programs teachers are told or encouraged to use to address the reading and writing skills of all students in their classes, not just the struggling students. These approaches are not intended to foster analytical reading skills although they can supplement a critical analysis of the texts students read, either as an introduction to them or as an exploration of the seminal ideas of the author's time that may have influenced them. As the focus group teachers told us, only students in Pre-AP and AP classes regularly do close or analytical reading. That the development of analytical reading skills is confined to the top third of Arkansas's students may be a good part of the explanation for the high remediation rate in post-secondary education and the high failure rate on the AP tests themselves.

Using Applebee's percentages in Table 7.4 on page 123 in his 1993 report as a baseline for comparison, we found a marked decrease in close analytical reading from the late 1980s to the present. In his study, teachers rated the influence of different approaches to literary study on classroom pedagogy and 50 percent gave close reading a very high rating, while 67 percent gave reader response a very high rating. In the Arkansas study, however, which asked respondents to indicate their preferred approach for teaching a major literary work, a large majority of teachers at each grade level indicated a preference for non-analytical approaches—approaches other than close reading—for teaching literary non-fiction as well as fiction, poetry, or drama.

Using Squire and Applebee's 1968 percentages as a baseline for comparing the amount of instructional time devoted to literary study, we also found a sharp decrease in the time devoted to literary study—from 52 percent to about 30 percent or less. Moreover, a scheme we used for classifying the primary focus of student attention in the various approaches English teachers use for literary study suggests that students' primary attention is apt to be directed to something other than the content and features of the text itself in about two-thirds of the classes in our study, whether they are studying imaginative literature or literary non-fiction. A pedagogy whose primary focus is something other than what is in the text is just as serious a matter as an incoherent, skills-oriented reading and literature curriculum. If teachers driven by skills-oriented state standards and tests do not have the time or do not know how to teach their students to read closely, especially in the middle school, students will struggle not only in Pre-AP, AP, standard,

and honors courses, they will struggle in post-secondary courses regardless of the subject they study. They will clearly not acquire the knowledge base they need for "critical thinking" or much literary knowledge.

Skills-driven approaches can *perhaps* foster students' ability to comprehend a text so that they perform better on a state's literacy assessments. Skills-driven approaches, however, do not teach them how to read a text, literary or otherwise, analytically. Skills-driven approaches give little instruction in understanding that (and how) a well-written text unites consciously crafted "parts" so that the text embodies the author's meaning and creates a specific effect on readers. They give little if any instruction in examining the artistry, or excellence, of a text whether considered as a whole or as a unified combination of parts.

Because many teachers believe that what their students lack are reading comprehension skills, not common world knowledge as well as knowledge of a text's literary structure, literary history, and literary context in order to read older, more complex works of fiction written for mature readers, they often point their students to easier and contemporary works of fiction and ask them to make connections with personal or contemporary social issues on the assumption that making links to contemporary issues will sufficiently motivate them to read. They further assume that the act of reading alone (and reading these kinds of texts, with mini-lessons on skills) will improve their reading comprehension. Unfortunately, students who are taught to read a literary work as if it were a reading comprehension exercise (i.e., devoid of any literary history or literary context), or solely as a self-reflective activity (as if their response to a literary work is more important than what the author may actually have written) may not readily learn how to read analytically.

## **VII. Recommendations**

### **A. Recommendations for Secondary School Curriculum Policies**

1. The Arkansas Department of Education needs to develop the framework for an appropriately challenging English language arts curriculum for students in grades 7-12 in the middle third of academic performance. We applaud the Department's effort to make Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement English courses available in every high school and to encourage maximum possible enrollment in them. Teachers in the focus groups expressed support for an open enrollment policy. We also applaud the emphasis on raising the achievement of low-performing students and retaining them in high school until graduation. However, it is clear from our survey data and from the focus group meetings that the needs of those who are in neither the top third nor the bottom third of their grade-level cohort are not being met either by these AP and Pre-AP courses or by intervention programs that treat all students in other classes as if they were in the bottom third.
2. The Arkansas Department of Education should develop and provide guidelines for stronger literature and reading programs in grades K-8, with a special stress on vocabulary development. As teachers in the focus groups noted, too many students are encouraged to enroll in Pre-AP or AP classes in high school without adequate preparation for them. The state's middle grades do not consistently have strong reading curricula, especially if they are guided by commercial or mandated programs stressing student choice of their reading materials.
3. The governor of Arkansas and the commissioner of education in Arkansas should appoint a committee of Arkansas residents and educators to designate five culturally and historically significant novels or plays, as well as a body of culturally and historically significant poetry and

literary non-fiction, reflecting different but recognized periods in our nation's civic and literary heritage, to be taught to all public high school students in the state over a five-year period, at the end of which a new committee will be appointed to make a similar recommendation for the next five-year period. This list should be similar in form and depth to the list of required readings assessed in British Columbia's high school exit test in literature (Common Core, 2009, p. 33). Excerpts from these novels, plays, and poems should be used on state assessments.

4. The Arkansas Department of Education needs to require positive evidence from *independent research* (research that has *not been commissioned or conducted* by the vendor) before endorsing any intervention programs and related professional development for teachers designed to improve the reading and writing skills of low-performing students.

### **B. Recommendations for Staffing Policies**

1. High school English teachers should have a maximum student load of 80 students per day (NCTE, 1999) and no more than five periods of teaching per day.
2. The Arkansas Department of Education should prioritize professional development for all English teachers in rhetorical theory and analysis and in how to do and teach close reading using historically and culturally significant texts.

### **C. Recommendations for Undergraduate and Teacher Preparation Programs in English**

1. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education should direct Departments of English at any university at which students can become licensed to teach English to take explicit notice of their undergraduate majors who propose to become secondary English teachers and make specific efforts to teach these majors how to read texts closely and analytically.
2. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education should direct English education programs in the state to emphasize in their methods courses how to do and teach close reading.

### **D. Recommendations for State Assessments in Grade 10 and State Reading and Literature Standards**

1. The Arkansas Department of Education should use reading passages, writing prompts, and types of questions on state assessments in grade 10 that provide models for high school English teachers, such as those in ACT's Reading, English, and Writing subtests or in British Columbia's high school exit test (Common Core, 2009, pp. 25-33).
2. The state's high school standards should include culture-rich and culture-specific reading and literature standards similar to those in the November, 2009 draft of the Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework, and the state should request that such standards serve as guides to the common assessments to be developed on the basis of the final version of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) standards it may adopt in 2010 (CCSSI, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_grade12\\_2005/s0206.asp](http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_grade12_2005/s0206.asp).

<sup>2</sup> <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/archived>

<sup>3</sup> *Joint Meeting of the Arkansas State Boards of Education October, 2006 diploma\_100906.pdf.*

<sup>4</sup> Minutes, February 4, 2008 Meeting of the Four-Year Workgroup of the Taskforce on College Remediation, Retention, and Graduation ([staging.arkleg.state.ar.us/data/HigherEdRemediation/.../4yrmin.pdf](http://staging.arkleg.state.ar.us/data/HigherEdRemediation/.../4yrmin.pdf)); Also see (<http://www.arstateimprovementgrant.com/SIGGoals/Overview/tabid/55/Default.aspx>).

<sup>5</sup> Personal Communication on 2/25/10 from Karen Hodges with statistical information from Steve Floyd dated March 31, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Personal Communication from Kay Wilson, September 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board Regular Quarterly Meeting, Friday, January 30, 2009. <[http://www.adhe.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/AHEC%20Board/Agendas/Agenda\\_book\\_013009\\_v2.pdf](http://www.adhe.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/AHEC%20Board/Agendas/Agenda_book_013009_v2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> "NAEP assesses reading skills that students use in all subject areas and in their out-of school and recreational reading. By design, many NAEP passages require interpretive and critical skills usually taught as part of the English curriculum. However, NAEP is an assessment of varied reading skills, not a comprehensive assessment of literary study. The development of the broad range of skills that the nation's students need to read successfully in both literary and informational texts is the responsibility of teachers across the curriculum, as well as of parents and the community" (National Assessment Governing Board, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> "The Standards aim to align instruction with the [Distribution of Literary and Informational Passages in the 2009 NAEP Reading Framework] so that many more students can meet the demands of college and career readiness. ...Fulfilling the standards for 6-12 ELA requires much greater attention to literary nonfiction than has been traditional" (CCSSI, *College- and Career-Ready Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Language*, March 10, 2010, p. 3).

<sup>10</sup> See a 2008 report, "The Development of ATOS: The Renaissance Readability Formula," by Michael Milone, available from Renaissance Learning.

<sup>11</sup> The following web site provides access to books in the Accelerated Reader database and their readability levels: <http://www.arbookfind.com/Default.aspx>.

<sup>12</sup> According to the Arkansas Department of Education, as noted in reporter Rob Moritz's "Legislative Efforts Paying Off in Teacher Equity" (*The Morning News*, 12/15/08), "teacher turnover has dropped significantly since the 2000-2001 school year, when nearly 20 percent of new teachers quit after one year," with more recent figures showing that the "percentage of teachers not returning after five years dropped to 26.5 percent for 2003-2004."

<sup>13</sup> According to Diane Ravitch, this country had a "de facto curriculum for most of the nineteenth century when the textbooks in each subject were interchangeable." She further notes: "For the first half of the twentieth century as well, we had an implicit national curriculum that was decisively shaped by the college entrance examinations of the College Board; their highly respected examinations were based on a specific and explicit syllabus, designed by teachers and professors in each subject" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 232).

<sup>14</sup> From Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): In *The New Criticism* (1941), John Crowe Ransom "called for a more 'objective' criticism focusing on the intrinsic qualities of a work rather than on its biographical or historical contexts."

<sup>15</sup> <http://smartstepliteracylab.org/about.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.smartstepliteracylab.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/litlabbrochure09.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.smartstepliteracylab.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/litlabbrochure09.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.cpre.org> or  
[http://www.cpre.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=58&Itemid=102](http://www.cpre.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58&Itemid=102)

<sup>19</sup> The Arkansas Department of Education has to date (March 1, 2009) not responded to requests for a list of the school districts under contract with America's Choice in Arkansas, so we have not been able to confirm or disconfirm what this participant told us.

<sup>20</sup> Jim Purcell, "The Future of Arkansas Higher Education," PowerPoint, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Arkansas Department of Education.

<sup>21</sup> "Reading" and "English" as sites of remediation result from the ACT's separation of those two subjects on its examination. Students needing remediation in "English" are unsuccessful in answering questions about grammar, usage, and organization. Students needing remediation in "Reading" are unsuccessful in answering questions involving close, analytic reading of passages from four disciplines: literature (fiction), humanities, social sciences, and science.

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## Appendix A: Survey Instrument by Telephone

### INTRODUCTION 1:

"Good afternoon / evening, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from the University of New Hampshire. We are conducting a study of the literature and reading curriculum of English teachers in Arkansas in conjunction with the University of Arkansas's Department of Education Reform. You've been randomly selected from the English teachers in your school to participate in this study."

"I'd like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.  
This survey addresses the following core questions:

"What authors and titles of fiction and nonfiction works of book-length are students in grades 9-11 assigned to read?"

"How much class time is devoted to literary study?"

"How do students study these works of book-length?"

### INTRODUCTION 2:

"Thank you very much for helping us with this important study. Before we begin, I want to assure you that all of your answers are strictly confidential. They will be combined with answers from other English teachers from across the state. This call may be monitored for quality assurance."

"Participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time."

"The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete."

### RECORD SEX OF RESPONDENT

#### QC1

"Let's begin. Please think about two different English classes that you teach, either standard or honors level, from 9th to 11th grade. I'm going to ask you several questions about each class. Please exclude remedial, advanced, AP or IB classes, and elective classes from this survey."

"Do you currently teach standard or honors English classes to students in grades 9 through 11?"

#### Q1A

"Let's start with the first class. For this class please think about the first that you teach on Monday morning or the first course you teach in the week"

"What is the name of the class?"

#### Q2A

"Just to confirm, what grade is this course?"

#### Q3A

"Is this a standard course or an honors course?"

#### Q4A

"How many students were in this class the last time you taught it?"

#### Q5A

"Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?"

#### Q6A

"What is the name and date or edition of the anthology?"

#### Q7A

"About what percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read?"

#### Q8A

"What novels and plays do you assign and teach in this class?" "Any others?"

Q9A

"What major short story authors do you assign and teach in this class? "Any others?"

Q10A

"What major poets do you assign and teach in this class? "Any others?"

Q11A

"How are these works and/or authors selected?"

READ RESPONSES AND CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 by you, the teacher;
- 2 by your department;
- 3 by curriculum decision;
- 4 by students; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q12A

"On average, what percentage of class time, that is, how many periods or blocks per week, do you spend on any one book-length work in the academic year for this class?"

Q13A

"How do you typically organize discussion in this class?"

READ RESPONSES, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 whole class discussions;
- 2 small discussion groups;
- 3 prepared teacher questions;
- 4 student questions; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q14A

"What forms of assessment do you employ?"

READ RESPONSES, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 book reports;
- 2 book reviews;
- 3 oral reports;
- 4 research paper;
- 5 powerpoint or other media presentations;
- 6 exams; or
- 7 something else? SPECIFY

Q15A

"Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly ... in class or outside of class ... in response to assignments?"

READ RESPONSES, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 journal writing,
- 2 essays,
- 3 quizzes, or
- 4 some other way. SPECIFY

Q16A

"Do you assign reading to be done at home?"

Q17A

"About how many pages per week?"

Q18A

"Do you require a major research paper?"

Q19A

"How much total class time do you allot for it?"

Q20A

"I'd like to read you a short description of several approaches to literary reading and study that you might apply..."  
"Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to literary reading and study?"

- 1 Close reading or New Criticism;
- 2 Biographical or contextual;
- 3 Reader response;
- 4 Multicultural; or
- 5 Something else. SPECIFY

Q21A

"What book-length works of literary non-fiction, such as biographies, speeches, essays, diaries, or autobiographies, do you assign and teach in this first class?" "Any others?"

Q22A

"What major authors of essays and speeches do you assign and teach? "

Q23A

"How are these non-fiction works or authors selected?"

READ RESPONSES AND CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 by you, the teacher;
- 2 by your department;
- 3 by curriculum decision;
- 4 by students; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q24A

"How many periods or blocks do you spend on any ONE book-length non-fiction work in the academic year in this class?"

Q25A

"Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to the reading and study of literary non-fiction?"

- 1 Close reading or New Criticism;
- 2 Biographical or contextual;
- 3 Reader response;
- 4 Multicultural; or
- 5 Something else. SPECIFY

Q26A

"What major technical or informational texts do you assign and teach in this class?" "Any others?"

Q27A

"How are these texts selected?"

READ RESPONSES AND CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 by you, the teacher;
- 2 by your department;
- 3 by curriculum decision;
- 4 by students; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q28A

"How many periods or blocks do you spend on any one technical or informational text in the academic year in this class?"

Q1B

"Now, I'd like to ask the same questions about the first INSERT COURSE course you teach on Monday morning or the first time you teach it in the week."

"Again, please exclude remedial, advanced, AP or IB classes, and elective classes from this survey."

"What is the name of the second class?"

Q2B

"Just to confirm, what grade is this course?"

Q3B

"Is this a standard course or an honors course?"

Q4B

"How many students were in this class the last time you taught it?"

Q5B

"Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?"

Q6B

"What is the name and date ... or edition... of the anthology?"

Q7B

"What percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read?"

Q8B

"What novels and plays do you assign and teach in this class?" "Any others?"

Q9B

"What MAJOR short story authors do you assign and teach in this class? "Any others?"

Q10B

"What major poets do you assign and teach in this class? "Any others?"

Q11B

"How are these works and/or authors selected?"

READ RESPONSES AND CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 by you, the teacher;
- 2 by your department;
- 3 by curriculum decision;
- 4 by students; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q12B

"On average, what percentage of class time, that is, how many periods or blocks per week, do you spend on any one book-length work of fiction, drama, or poetry in the academic year for this class?"

Q13B

"How do you typically organize discussion in this class?"

READ RESPONSES, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 whole class discussions;
- 2 small discussion groups;

Literary Study in Arkansas

- 3 prepared teacher questions;
- 4 student questions; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q14B

"What forms of assessment do you employ?"

READ RESPONSES, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 book reports;
- 2 book reviews;
- 3 oral reports;
- 4 research paper;
- 5 power point or other media presentations;
- 6 exams; or
- 7 something else. SPECIFY

Q15B

"Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly in response to assignments in class or outside of class...?"

READ RESPONSES, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 journal writing,
- 2 essays, or
- 3 quizzes.

Q16B

"Do you assign reading to be done at home?"

Q17B

"About how many pages per week?"

Q18B

"Do you require a major research paper?"

Q19B

"How much total class time do you allot for it?"

Q20B

"I'd like to read you a short description of several approaches to literary reading and study that you might apply..."

"Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to literary reading and study?"

- 1 Close reading or New Criticism;
- 2 Biographical or contextual;
- 3 Reader response;
- 4 Multicultural; or
- 5 Something else. SPECIFY

Q21B

"What book-length works of literary non-fiction, such as biographies, speeches, essays, diaries, or autobiographies, do you assign and teach in this second class?" "Any others?"

Q22B

"What major authors of essays and speeches do you assign and teach? "

Q23B

"How are these non-fiction works or authors selected?"

READ RESPONSES AND CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

Literary Study in Arkansas

- 1 by you, the teacher;
- 2 by your department;
- 3 by curriculum decision;
- 4 by students; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q24B

"How many periods or blocks do you spend on any one work of literary non-fiction in the academic year in this class?"

Q25B

"Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to the reading and study of literary non-fiction?"

- 1 Close reading or New Criticism;
- 2 Biographical or contextual;
- 3 Reader response;
- 4 Multicultural; or
- 5 Something else. SPECIFY

Q26B

"What major technical or informational texts do you assign and teach in this class?" "Any others?"

Q27B

"How are these texts selected?"

READ RESPONSES AND CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- 1 by you, the teacher;
- 2 by your department;
- 3 by curriculum decision;
- 4 by students; or
- 5 some other way. SPECIFY

Q28B

"How many periods or blocks do you spend on a technical or informational text in the academic year in this class?"

QD1

"Now I'd like to ask a few questions about your background for statistical purposes."

"For how many years have you been teaching English or literature in high school?"

QD2

"Do you have a Bachelor's Degree in English or Literature?"

QD3

"What was your undergraduate major if not in English or Literature?"

QD4

"From what college or university did you receive your Bachelor's Degree?"

QD5

"Do you have a Master's Degree? IF YES: "Is it in English or Literature?"

QD6

"If in English or Literature, is your Master's Degree a MA, a MAT or a MED?"

QD7

"From what college or university did you receive your Master's Degree?"

QD8

"Do you teach only English or Literature courses or do you teach other subjects as well?"



QD9

"What is your sex?"

QD10

"And finally, what is your age?"

END: "Those are all of the questions I have. The results of this study will be published by the University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform." "Thanks again for your help and have a good day."

## Appendix B: Survey Instrument by Mail / Fax / Internet

The University of New Hampshire Survey Center is conducting a study of the literature and reading curriculum of English teachers in Arkansas in conjunction with the University of Arkansas' Department of Education Reform. You've been selected from the English teachers in your school to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. Please be assured that all of your answers are strictly confidential. They will be combined with answers from other English teachers from across the state, and will not be connected to you in any way. Participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may choose to skip any question.

When finished, please return the survey in the included return envelope. If you have any questions, please call us at (800) 786-9760, Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM Eastern Time.

Please **Circle** the number next to the response you wish to give.

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For the following questions please think about the FIRST course referenced on the cover letter that you teach on Monday morning or the first section of that course you teach in the week.

1A. Please confirm the name of that first class: \_\_\_\_\_

2A. Just to confirm, what grade is this course?

Note: If the section comprises of a mix of grades, please select which grade level the most students are in.

1. 9th Grade / Freshmen      2. 10th Grade / Sophomores      3. 11th Grade / Juniors

3A. Is this a standard course or an honors course?

1. Standard      2. Honors

4A. How many students were in this class the last time you taught it? \_\_\_\_\_

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5A. Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?

6A. What is the name and date ... or edition ... of the anthology?

7A. About what percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read? \_\_\_\_\_%

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8A. What novels and plays do you assign and teach in this class?

9A. What major short story authors do you assign and teach in this class?

10A. What major poets do you assign and teach in this class?

11A. How are these works and/or authors selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher  
2. By your department  
3. By curriculum decision  
4. By students  
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

12A. On average, what percentage of class time, that is, how many periods or blocks per week, do you spend on any one book-length work in the academic year for this class? \_\_\_\_\_%

13A. How do you typically organize discussion in this class? (Circle all that apply)

1. Whole class discussions
2. Small discussion groups
3. Prepared teacher questions
4. Student questions
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

14A. What forms of assessment do you employ? (Circle all that apply)

1. Book reports
2. Book reviews
3. Oral reports
4. Research paper
5. PowerPoint or other media presentations
6. Exams
7. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

15A. Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly ... in class or outside of class ... in response to assignments? (Circle all that apply)

1. Journal writing
2. Essays
3. Quizzes
4. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

16A. Do you assign reading to be done at home?

17A. About how many pages per week? \_\_\_\_\_

18A. Do you require a major research paper?

19A. How much total class time do you allot for it? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

20A. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to literary reading and study?

1. Close reading or New Criticism;
2. Biographical or contextual;
3. Reader response;
4. Multicultural;
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

21A. What book-length works of literary non-fiction, such as biographies, speeches, essays, diaries, or autobiographies, do you assign and teach in this first class? Any others?

22A. What major authors of essays and speeches do you assign and teach?

23A. How are these non-fiction works or authors of works selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

24A. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any ONE book-length non-fiction work in the academic year in this class? \_\_\_\_\_

25A. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to the reading and study of literary non-fiction?

1. Close reading or New Criticism;

2. Biographical or contextual;
3. Reader response;
4. Multicultural;
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

---

26A. What major technical or informational texts do you assign and teach in this class?

27A. How are these texts selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

28A. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any one informational text in the academic year in this class?

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The following questions refer to the second course referenced on the cover letter that you teach on Monday morning or the first section of that course you teach in the week. If you do **not** teach a second class, please skip to 1D on Page 6.

1B. Please confirm the name of that course: \_\_\_\_\_

2B. Just to confirm, what grade is this course?

Note: If the section comprises of a mix of grades, please select which grade level the most students are in.

1. 9th Grade / Freshmen
2. 10th Grade / Sophomores
3. 11th Grade / Juniors

3B. Is this a standard course or an honors course?

1. Standard
2. Honors

4B. How many students were in this class the last time you taught it? \_\_\_\_\_

---

5B. Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?

6B. What is the name and date ... or edition ... of the anthology?

7B. About what percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read? \_\_\_\_\_%

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8B. What novels and plays do you assign and teach in this class?

9B. What major short story authors do you assign and teach in this class?

10B. What major poets do you assign and teach in this class?

11B. How are these works and/or authors selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

12B. On average, what percentage of class time, that is, how many periods or blocks per week, do you spend on any one book-length work in the academic year for this class? \_\_\_\_\_%

13B. How do you typically organize discussion in this class? (Circle all that apply)

1. Whole class discussions
2. Small discussion groups
3. Prepared teacher questions
4. Student questions
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

14B. What forms of assessment do you employ? (Circle all that apply)

1. Book reports
2. Book reviews
3. Oral reports
4. Research paper
5. PowerPoint or other media presentations
6. Exams
7. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

15B. Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly ... in class or outside of class ... in response to assignments? (Circle all that apply)

1. Journal writing
2. Essays
3. Quizzes
4. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

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16B. Do you assign reading to be done at home?

17B. About how many pages per week? \_\_\_\_\_

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18B. Do you require a major research paper?

19B. How much total class time do you allot for it? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

---

20B. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to literary reading and study?

1. Close reading or New Criticism;
2. Biographical or contextual;
3. Reader response;
4. Multicultural;
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

---

21B. What book-length works of literary non-fiction, such as biographies, speeches, essays, diaries, or autobiographies, do you assign and teach in this first class? Any others?

22B. What major authors of essays and speeches do you assign and teach?

23B. How are these non-fiction works or authors of works selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

24B. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any ONE book-length non-fiction work in the academic year in this class? \_\_\_\_\_

25B. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to the reading and study of literary non-fiction?

1. Close reading or New Criticism;

2. Biographical or contextual;
3. Reader response;
4. Multicultural;
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

---

26B. What major technical or informational texts do you assign and teach in this class?

27B. How are these texts selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify \_\_\_\_\_

28B. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any one informational text in the academic year in this class?

\_\_\_\_\_

---

D1. For how many years have you been teaching English or literature in high school? \_\_\_\_\_

D2. Do you have a Bachelor's Degree in English or Literature?

1. Yes                      2. No

D3. What is your Bachelor's Degree in if not in English or Literature? \_\_\_\_\_

D4. From what college or university did you receive your Bachelor's Degree? \_\_\_\_\_

D5. Do you have a Master's Degree?    1. Yes                      2. Yes, but not in English or Literature                      3. No

D6. If your Master's Degree is in English or Literature, is it a MA, a MAT or a MED?    1. MA    2. MAT    3. MED

D7. From what college or university did you receive your Master's Degree? \_\_\_\_\_

D8. Do you teach only English or Literature or do you teach other subjects as well?

1. Teach only English / Literature                      2. Teach other subjects as well

D9. What is your sex?    1. Male                      2. Female

D10. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

*Those are all of the questions. The results of this study will be published by the University of Arkansas's Department of Education Reform. Thank you again for your help.*

***Directions for returning the survey can be found at the beginning of the survey***

## Appendix C: Recruitment Materials

### *Script for Contacting Schools*

[School Name]  
[School Address]  
[School City], [School State] [School zip]

[school Phone]            [School Fax]

“Good morning / afternoon, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m calling from the University of New Hampshire. We are conducting a study of the literature and reading curriculum of English teachers in Arkansas in conjunction with the University of Arkansas' Department of Education Reform.

“For the purposes of this study, we are looking for English teachers that teach either standard or honors level classes, from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Our records show that [teacher name] teaches one of those courses in your school and we would like to know the best way to contact him/her? We are available to contact teachers whenever it is most convenient for them, so a school number, home phone number, cell phone or email if that is more convenient.

#### **RECORD AS MUCH CONTACT INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE.”**

##### IF ASKED:

“Thank you for your assistance with this project. This survey addresses the following core questions:

“What authors and titles of fiction and nonfiction works of book-length are students in grades 9–11 assigned to read?”

“How much class time is devoted to literary study?”

“How do students study these works of book-length?”

##### IF ASKED FOR INFO ON THE PROJECT:

“We would be happy to send you an information sheet about this project. Can I e-mail this to you?”

RECORD EMAIL ADDRESS

***Email Invitation***

Dear «PROPER\_NAME»,

This is the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. We are conducting a study of the literature and reading curriculum of English teachers in Arkansas in conjunction with the University of Arkansas' Department of Education Reform, and we would greatly appreciate your input. We spoke to someone from your school who said that email was the best way to contact you.

We understand that you are very busy, but with your input and the input of English teachers across the state, we hope to be able to present an accurate picture of what the central content of the high school English curriculum in Arkansas is at present. We also hope to make recommendations for ways to strengthen this curriculum so that students can better develop the reading and writing skills needed for authentic college coursework.

You've been randomly selected from all the English teachers in Arkansas to participate in this important study.

In order to make it as easy as possible for you to complete the survey, we would like to provide you the option to either take the survey over the phone with one of our interviewers, or complete a web version of the survey.

Please call us to take the survey or to schedule a time that is most convenient for you to take the survey over the phone. We can be reached Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM Eastern Time at (800) 786-9760. The survey should only take 10-15 minutes of your time.

If you would like to take the web version of the survey, please go to <http://www.unh.edu/survey-center/areng09.htm>

Please note, for the web survey, the first class you will be asked about is your «Course Name» class, and the second class you will be asked about is your «course2n» class. When asked, please use the code «sapid» to access the survey.

If you have any questions, please call us at (800) 786-9760 or email us at [survey.center@unh.edu](mailto:survey.center@unh.edu).

Thank you very much in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,  
The University of New Hampshire Survey Center



***Email Reminder***

Dear [Name],

We are writing to ask you to participate in a survey of the major literary and non-literary works that English teachers in Arkansas assign in grades 9, 10, and 11. We apologize if you have previously received an email from us, we are just following up with anyone who has not yet completed the survey. The purpose of this survey is to provide state policy makers with an accurate picture of what is taught in these grades in Arkansas and to recommend ways the state could provide its English teachers with effective resources for teaching a strong 21st century English curriculum in Arkansas.

Three faculty members at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville are in charge of this study: Professor Christian Goering and Professor Sandra Stotsky in the College of Education and Health Professions, and Professor David Jolliffe in the Department of English in the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. The survey is being conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center for them. It has no official connection to the Arkansas Department of Education.

You have been randomly selected from all the English teachers in Arkansas to participate in this important study. We know you are very busy, but we would greatly appreciate your participation. If you have any questions about the study itself, please feel free to contact Professor Stotsky at 479 575 7282.

In order to make it as easy as possible for you to complete the survey, we are giving you the option to take the survey over the phone with one of our interviewers, or to complete a web version of the survey. If you would like to take the web version of the survey, please go to <http://www.unh.edu/survey-center/areng09.htm>

If you prefer to take the survey over the phone, please call to schedule a time that is most convenient for you. We can be reached Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM Eastern Time at (800) 786-9760. The survey should only take 10-15 minutes of your time.

Please note, for the web survey, the first class you will be asked about is your **English 10** class, and the second class you will be asked about is your **English 11** class. When asked, please use the code **1000** to access the survey.

If you have any questions, please call us at (800) 786-9760 or email us at [survey.center@unh.edu](mailto:survey.center@unh.edu).

Thank you very much in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,  
The University of New Hampshire Survey Center

***Thank You Email***

Dear «PROPER\_NAME»,

We are writing to thank you for participating in this study of Arkansas English teachers, conducted by the University of Arkansas and the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. Your input on the major literary and non-literary works that you cover in your class has been invaluable to this study. Your contribution will allow the University of Arkansas make stronger recommendations to the Arkansas Department of Education to provide the state's English teachers with effective resources for teaching a strong 21st century English curriculum in Arkansas.

If you are receiving this email but have not yet completed the survey, there is still time to contribute! Please visit <http://www.unh.edu/survey-center/areng09.htm> to complete the survey. Please use the code **«sapid»** to access the survey. The first class you will be asked about is your «Course Name» class, and the second class you will be asked about is your «course2n» class.

Once again, thank you very much for your participation in this important study.

Sincerely,

The University of Arkansas and the University of New Hampshire Survey Center

***Principal Letter***

Dear «Pname»,

We are writing to you to ask for your assistance in reaching English teachers in your school. Several faculty members at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, are working with the University of New Hampshire Survey Center to survey Arkansas English teachers in grades 9 to 11 for information on their reading and writing assignments. Professors Christian Goering, David Jolliffe, and Sandra Stotsky would like to develop an accurate picture of what is being taught in these grades in Arkansas and recommend useful resources for the state to provide its high school English teachers so that they can provide their students with a strong 21st century English curriculum.

Many teachers in Arkansas have already participated in the survey, but we would like to gather information from more teachers in each county. Now that the school year is over, teachers who have not had the opportunity to participate may have more time to complete a short 20-minute survey (see attached). We hope you can help us to reach them.

Could you please forward the enclosed envelopes, each of which contains a copy of the survey and a stamped, self-addressed reply envelope, to the teachers in your school who have not yet completed this survey? Their names are on the envelopes. We would very much appreciate your forwarding these envelopes to them with your encouragement to complete the survey.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact me at 603-862-2226 or by email at [andrew.smith@unh.edu](mailto:andrew.smith@unh.edu). You can also contact Professor Sandra Stotsky at 617 455 8222 (cell) or by email at [sstotsky@uark.edu](mailto:sstotsky@uark.edu). This is a very important project for English education in Arkansas. Thank you very much in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Andrew E. Smith, Ph.D.,  
Director,  
UNH Survey Center

enc.

## **Appendix D: Focus Group Meeting Sites, Schools Represented, and Questionnaire**

### **A. Focus Group Meeting Sites and Schools Represented**

Pine Bluff (September 15, 2009)

- Watson Chapel High School
- Jack Robey Junior High
- White Hall High School

Walnut Ridge (September 22, 2009)

- Greene Co. Tech
- Hoxie High School
- Jonesboro High School

Arkadelphia (September 24, 2009)

- Arkadelphia High School
- Bismarck High School
- Lewisville High School
- Hope High School

Farmington (September 28, 2009)

- Fayetteville High School
- Lincoln High School
- Bentonville High School
- Greenland High School

Beebe (October 6, 2009)

- Beebe High School
- Searcy High School

Little Rock (October 8, 2009)

- Hall High School
- J.A. Fair Magnet High School
- North Little Rock High School
- McClellan Magnet High School

Harrison (October 20, 2009)

- Green Forest High School
- Harrison High School

West Helena (October 22, 2009)

- Marvell High School
- Barton High School

### **B. Questionnaire: Focus Group Starting Topics and Questions**

#### **Topics:**

- Assigned literary fiction, literary non-fiction, and informational texts; why they are selected; and how they are taught
- Teacher views of student motivation to read and write about book-length works of fiction, drama, poetry, and non-fiction

**Preliminary points/topics to be covered with group members prior to starting the actual questions:**

- | Good afternoon!
- | Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We will honor your time by making sure that we wrap up in the next 90 minutes.
- | Does anyone mind if we tape record this for our records? We won't share the tapes with your school administrators or anyone outside of the research team.
- | Our primary purpose is to gather information that helps us understand the literary and non-literary content of the English curriculum in Arkansas today, and whether students' major reading experiences, as a function of their English curriculum, prepare them for post-secondary education.
- | All information we collect is confidential as to who provided it. For example, we will not disclose who actually participated in this focus group nor will our final report make any attributions of quotes. We hope this encourages you (if you need encouragement) to speak freely.
- | We intend to break our questions into two thematic groups. These are:
  1. Teacher views of the texts they assign and how they teach students to read a literary or non-literary work
  2. Teacher views of student motivation to read and write about book-length works of fiction, drama, poetry, or nonfiction
- | Please complete the sign-up sheet, W9 forms, and release form and hand them in.
- | Any questions before we start?

**Assigned Texts and Pedagogical Questions:**

1. Describe how assigned texts are typically chosen in your department.  
[e.g.: department head decision, curriculum committee, resource availability, reading level of students, vertical teaming, individual teacher discretion, student choice, other]
2. How many of you assign whole texts for whole class or different texts for different groups in class?
3. How do you handle the small group instruction of multiple literatures texts being used simultaneously?
4. Have you ever participated in curriculum mapping or vertical teaming within your department?
5. Does your school have a list of works students read each year? For example, will every eighth grader read a certain title, every ninth grader, etc. OR is there more autonomy with book selection? Which do you/would you prefer?
6. How long, on average do you typically spend teaching a book-length work?
7. Does the number of full-length books, plays, poems you assign depend on methodology (pedagogy) of teaching?
8. Is it more important to cover multiple works or cover fewer works with more depth in your opinion? How do you judge 'depth of study'?
9. Do you, or the school district try to assign stories or other literary texts by Arkansas writers? Who are they?
10. Do you assign outside reading to your students? If you assign your students their choice of X number of books outside the required texts you teach the whole class, do you determine their age-appropriateness or readability levels? How?
11. What are the sources of the book list, if you give one, for required outside reading? E.g. Lit lab?, totally free student choice?]
12. If totally free student choice, how do you, if at all, determine appropriateness for grade level?

13. What kinds of ancillary materials, supplementary sources, or software are available to enhance student understanding of the assigned texts. Eg.: word processors, graphics packages, Spark Notes, Cliff's Notes, databases, library facilities, Internet/WWW, electronic books, other]

14. Given your specific circumstances, what do you find to be effective ways to hold your students accountable for doing out-of-class reading and reading-related assignments?

15. Do you find your students able or willing to read the texts assigned to them? Why or why not? What are their reading strengths? Reading weaknesses? For reluctant readers, what strategies have you used to attempt to motivate them to read book-length works?

16. Do you think your district has a coherent, progressively challenging, and content-rich curriculum in literature? Why or why not?

17. If you could be in charge of curriculum development in reading/literature in your district, how would you structure the literary/non-literary content for the secondary grades?

18. What barriers, if any, have you encountered in trying to use whole-text literary works in the classroom?

- too little time to teach
- inadequate teacher planning
- periods too short
- inadequately prepared students
- other\_\_\_\_\_

19. Are there any specific works or authors that you think all students should read before graduation from high school?

20. How would you try to ensure that students are better prepared for the reading they will do in college English courses?

21. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding literary standards?

Thank you for your time!

**Appendix E. Teachers in the Survey (D1-D10)**

**D1: For how many years have you been teaching English or literature in high school?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2 Years or less	69	16.2	17.6	17.6
	3 to 5 Years	83	19.5	21.2	38.9
	6 to 10 Years	83	19.5	21.2	60.1
	11 to 15 Years	47	11.1	12.0	72.1
	More than 15 Years	109	25.6	27.9	100.0
Total		391	92.0	100.0	
Missing	NA	22	5.2		
	System	12	2.8		
	Total	34	8.0		
Total		425	100.0		

**D2: Do you have a Bachelor's Degree in English or Literature?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	291	68.5	73.5	73.5
	No	105	24.7	26.5	100.0
	Total	396	93.2	100.0	
Missing	NA	27	6.4		
	System	2	.5		
	Total	29	6.8		
Total		425	100.0		

**D3: What was your undergraduate major if not English or Literature?\***

	Frequency	Percent
1. Education/Special Education/Elementary Education	13	28.9%
2. Drama/Theater/Speech/Communication/ Journalism	12	26.7%
3. Social Sciences/ History/Government	11	24.4%
4. Business	4	8%
5. Physical Education/Kinesiology	3	6%
6. Foreign Languages	2	4%
7. Other	5	11%
Total	50 degrees/45 teachers	100.9%

\*Five teachers indicated double majors.

**D4: "From what college or university did you receive your Bachelor's Degree?"**

Arkansas	112	Texas	7		
Oklahoma	5	Illinois	5		
Missouri	4	Mississippi	4		
Louisiana	3	Washington	2		
Pennsylvania	2	Other	8	Total	152

**D5: Do you have a Master's degree and, if yes, is it in English or literature?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	89	20.1	22.0	22.0
	Yes not in Eng or Lit	94	21.3	23.2	45.2
	No	222	50.2	54.8	100.0
	Total	405	91.6	100.0	
Missing	0	2	.5		
	NA	21	4.8		
	System	14	3.2		
	Total	37	8.4		
Total		442	100.0		

**D6: If in English or Literature, is your Master's degree a MA, a MAT, or a MED?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MA	34	8.0	42.5	42.5
	MAT	12	2.8	15.0	57.5
	MED	34	8.0	42.5	100.0
	Total	80	18.8	100.0	
Missing	DK	1	.2		
	NA	9	2.1		
	System	335	78.8		
	Total	345	81.2		
Total		425	100.0		

**D7: From what college or university did you receive your Master's Degree?**

In Arkansas	52
In Other States	19
Total	71

**D8: Do you teach only English or literature courses or do you teach other subjects as well?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Only Eng/Lit	244	57.4	60.5	60.5
	Other subjects	159	37.4	39.5	100.0
	Total	403	94.8	100.0	
Missing	NA	20	4.7		
	System	2	.5		
	Total	22	5.2		



**D8: Do you teach only English or literature courses or do you teach other subjects as well?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Only Eng/Lit	244	57.4	60.5	60.5
	Other subjects	159	37.4	39.5	100.0
	Total	403	94.8	100.0	
Missing	NA	20	4.7		
	System	2	.5		
	Total	22	5.2		
Total		425	100.0		

**D9: Sex of Course Instructor**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	55	12.9	13.3	13.3
	Female	357	84.0	86.7	100.0
	Total	412	96.9	100.0	
Missing	NA	13	3.1		
Total		425	100.0		

**D10: What is your age?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	21 to 29	69	16.2	17.6	17.6
	30 to 39	115	27.1	29.3	46.8
	40 to 49	83	19.5	21.1	67.9
	50 to 59	91	21.4	23.2	91.1
	60 or older	35	8.2	8.9	100.0
	Total	393	92.5	100.0	
Missing	NA	32	7.5		
Total		425	100.0		

**Appendix F: Courses/Classes Taught**

**Q2A and B: What grade is this course?**

		Grade Level				Total
		9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	Mix of grades	
1 <sup>st</sup> Course	Count	140	146	139	0	425
2 <sup>nd</sup> Course	Count	113	121	116	9	359
Total	Count	253	267	255	9	784

**Q3A and B: Is this a standard course or an honors course?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Standard	337	79.3	80.2	80.2
	Honors	83	19.5	19.8	100.0
	Total	420	98.8	100.0	
Missing	NA	3	.7		
	NA	2	.5		
	Total	5	1.2		
Total		425	100.0		

**Q4A and B: How many students were in this class the last time you taught it?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10 or Less	30	7.1	7.3	7.3
	11 to 15	67	15.8	16.3	23.5
	16 to 20	105	24.7	25.5	49.0
	21 to 25	125	29.4	30.3	79.4
	26 to 30	57	13.4	13.8	93.2
	More than 30	28	6.6	6.8	100.0
Total		412	96.9	100.0	
Missing	NA	13	3.1		
Total		425	100.0		

**C1 and 2: Number of teachers describing two courses at each combination of grade levels\***

First Course (Down)		Second Course (Across)				Total
		9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	Mix of grades	
9th Grade	Count	75	28	12	2	117
10th Grade	Count	23	71	26	4	124
11th Grade	Count	13	22	77	3	115
Total	Count	111	121	115	9	356

\*Note: This table shows 356, not 425, teachers because some did not describe two courses.

**Appendix G: All Major Titles Assigned Across All Courses**

All Major Titles Assigned in Order of Frequency	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Number of Courses
Titles	230	243	245	718
Romeo And Juliet	202	2	0	204
Julius Caesar	3	170	1	174
The Crucible	0	10	159	169
To Kill A Mockingbird	65	44	39	148
The Great Gatsby	2	7	88	97
Of Mice And Men	11	39	42	92
Antigone	1	78	1	80
The Odyssey	69	2	0	71
Animal Farm	46	23	1	70
Night	28	31	11	70
The Scarlet Letter	0	7	61	68
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	12	11	38	61
Lord of The Flies	16	20	6	42
Fahrenheit 451	8	23	10	41
A Raisin In The Sun	2	12	27	41
The Outsiders	22	11	5	38
Great Expectations	26	5	2	33
Anthem	12	16	4	32
The Glass Menagerie	0	7	18	25
Our Town	6	4	14	24
The Red Badge Of Courage	5	3	15	23
The Miracle Worker	22	0	0	22
Their Eyes Were Watching God	0	10	11	21
The Giver	15	5	1	21
The Grapes Of Wrath	0	2	18	20
Ethan Frome	2	7	10	19
The House On Mango Street	4	9	3	16
The Old Man and The Sea	4	4	8	16
Hamlet	1	3	11	15
Macbeth	0	1	13	14
Oedipus the King	1	12	1	14
The Pearl	6	1	6	13
The Pigman	7	6	0	13
A Midsummer Nights Dream	1	9	3	13
Things Fall Apart	4	7	2	13
A Christmas Carol	6	3	1	10
Othello	0	8	1	9
Frankenstein	1	3	5	9

1984	0	5	4	9
The Jungle	0	7	1	8
All Quiet on The Western Front	0	6	2	8
Black Boy	2	1	5	8
A Doll's House	0	6	2	8
Jane Eyre	2	3	3	8
Twelve Angry Men	1	0	6	7
Beowulf	0	1	6	7
Tale of Two Cities	3	3	1	7
Lesson Before Dying	0	3	4	7
Catcher In The Rye	1	3	2	6
Fallen Angels	0	3	3	6
Brave New World	0	4	2	6
The Things They Carried	1	1	4	6
As I Lay Dying	0	1	5	6
Wish You Well	6	0	0	6
Taming of the Shrew	1	4	1	6
My Antonia	0	5	1	6
The Awakening	0	0	6	6
Siddhartha	1	5	0	6
Speak	2	3	0	5
Moby Dick	1	0	4	5
Swallowing Stones	4	0	1	5
The Chosen	2	2	1	5
The Time Machine	0	5	0	5
Visit To A Small Planet	2	3	0	5
Last of the Mohicans	0	0	5	5
That Was Then, This Is Now	1	4	0	5
I am the Cheese	0	1	4	5
Death of a Salesman	0	3	2	5
The Call Of The Wild	3	1	0	4
Dante's Inferno	0	4	0	4
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	0	2	2	4
Pride And Prejudice	1	1	2	4
Cold Sassy Tree	1	1	2	4
Cry The Beloved Country	1	1	2	4
Much Ado About Nothing	0	1	3	4
Trifles	0	0	4	4
The Once and Future King	1	3	0	4
Tears of a Tiger	0	3	1	4
The Hobbit	1	3	0	4

Literary Study in Arkansas

A Streetcar Named Desire	0	0	4	4
Ellen Foster	0	0	4	4
Wuthering Heights	0	4	0	4
The Secret Life of Bees	0	4	0	4
Iliad	4	0	0	4
Go Ask Alice	0	2	2	4
The Metamorphosis	0	3	1	4
The War Of The Worlds	0	3	0	3
The Wave	2	0	1	3
Treasure Island	1	2	0	3
Canterbury Tales	0	0	3	3
Poisonwood Bible	0	0	3	3
The Merchant of Venice	0	2	1	3
The Girl in Hyacinth Blue	0	0	3	3
Cyrano de Bergerac	2	1	0	3
The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy	3	0	0	3
Forged by Fire	0	3	0	3
Summer of my German Soldier	1	1	1	3
The Devil's Arithmetic	0	3	0	3
Lilies Of The Field	1	1	0	2
The Voyage of the Frog	2	0	0	2
Necessary Roughness	1	0	1	2
A Painted House	0	0	2	2
Life On The Mississippi	2	0	0	2
The Freedom Writers' Diary	0	0	2	2
Gulliver's Travels	1	1	0	2
Heart Of Darkness	0	1	1	2
New Moon	0	1	1	2
Dracula	0	2	0	2
Medea	0	2	0	2
Lost in Yonkers	0	0	2	2
The Lightning Thief	0	2	0	2
King Arthur Legends	0	2	0	2
A Family Apart	2	0	0	2
Autobiography of Jane Pitman	0	1	1	2
Nothing but the Truth	1	0	1	2
Alas	2	0	0	2
Babylon	2	0	0	2
Pyramus and Thisbe	0	2	0	2
Ugly Duckling	0	2	0	2
October Sky	0	1	1	2

Literary Study in Arkansas

Monster	1	1	0	2
Like Water for Chocolate	0	0	2	2
The Raven	2	0	0	2
And Then There Were None	0	2	0	2
Silas Marner	0	2	0	2
The House of the Spirits	0	0	2	2
The Rag and Bone Shop	2	0	0	2
East of Eden	0	2	0	2
Soldier's Heart	0	0	2	2
Ana's Story	0	0	2	2
Durango Street	2	0	0	2
The Road	0	2	0	2
Fathers and Sons	0	0	2	2
The Adventures of Odysseus	2	0	0	2
Tuck Everlasting	0	2	0	2
The Story of My Life	0	2	0	2
The Reivers	0	0	2	2
The Importance of Being Earnest	0	2	0	2
The Friends	2	0	0	2
The Invisible Man	0	1	1	2
A Marriage Proposal	0	2	0	2
Whirligig	0	2	0	2
Hesiod's Theogony	0	0	1	1
Souder	0	1	0	1
The Lovely Bones	0	1	0	1
Harry Potter and the Chamber Of Secrets	0	1	0	1
Heroes Don't Run	0	1	0	1
Hatchet	0	1	0	1
Indian Captive	0	1	0	1
Tex	1	0	0	1
Chinese Cinderella	1	0	0	1
The Chocolate War	1	0	0	1
Flowers For Algernon	0	1	0	1
The Joke	0	1	0	1
The True Confessions Of Charlotte Doyle	1	0	0	1
Les Miserables	0	1	0	1
The Joy Luck Club	0	0	1	1
Twilight	1	0	0	1
Life As We Knew It	0	1	0	1
Le Morte D' Arthur	0	1	0	1
Light In The Forest	0	1	0	1

Literary Study in Arkansas

The Stranger	0	1	0	1
Bless Me, Ultima	0	1	0	1
Our Town	0	0	1	1
They Chose Their Own	1	0	0	1
A Thousand Acres	0	0	1	1
King Lear	0	0	1	1
The Tempest	0	1	0	1
Fountain Head	0	0	1	1
Once a Wolf	1	0	0	1
The Harry Aches	0	0	1	1
Riders to the Sea	0	0	1	1
Who Am I Without Him	1	0	0	1
Billy Budd	0	0	1	1
All The Pretty Horses	0	0	1	1
Four Past Midnight	0	0	1	1
House of the Scorpion	0	1	0	1
Summer of the Monkeys	0	1	0	1
Nickel and Dimed	0	0	1	1
The Bluest Eye	0	0	1	1
My Brother Sam Is Dead	0	0	1	1
Little Women	0	0	1	1
The Yearling	0	1	0	1
The Glass Castle	0	1	0	1
The Return of the Native	0	1	0	1
Not Without Laughter	0	1	0	1
Moll Flanders	0	0	1	1
Barrio Boy	1	0	0	1
Code Orange	0	1	0	1
Ulysses	0	1	0	1
Kite Runner	0	0	1	1
Angela's Ashes	0	1	0	1
Dandelion Wine	0	1	0	1
Where the Red Fern Grows	0	1	0	1
Rooftop	1	0	0	1
Oliver Twist	0	1	0	1
A Farewell to Arms	0	1	0	1
The Pact	0	1	0	1
The Virginian	0	1	0	1
My Sister's Keeper	0	0	1	1
A Long Walk to Freedom	1	0	0	1

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Bronx Masquerade	0	1	0	1
The Knight's Tale	0	0	1	1
Holes	0	0	1	1
Esperanza Rising	0	1	0	1
As You Like It	0	1	0	1
Absolutely Normal Chaos	1	0	0	1
The Color Purple	1	0	0	1
True Grit	0	0	1	1
Fifteen	1	0	0	1
Finding Forrester	0	1	0	1
Homeless Bird	1	0	0	1
Hiroshima	0	0	1	1
Ivanhoe	0	1	0	1
No Promises in the Wind	0	1	0	1
The Sound and the Fury	0	0	1	1
The Mayor of Casterbridge	0	1	0	1
The Handmaid's Tale	0	0	1	1
Murder on the Orient Express	0	0	1	1
A Man for All Seasons	0	1	0	1
The Heroic Slave	0	0	1	1
Clotel, or, a President's Daughter	0	0	1	1
Our Nig	0	0	1	1
Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey	1	0	0	1
Miracle's Boys	1	0	0	1
Rules of the Road	1	0	0	1
Gilgamesh the Hero	0	1	0	1
Everyman	0	0	1	1
Tevya and the First Daughter	0	0	1	1
Stargirl	0	1	0	1
Pygmalion	0	1	0	1
The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963	1	0	0	1
My Bondage and My Freedom	0	0	1	1
A Wrinkle in Time	1	0	0	1
Farewell to Manzanar	1	0	0	1
Private Peaceful	0	1	0	1
Among the Hidden	0	1	0	1
The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants	0	1	0	1
Darkness before Dawn	0	1	0	1
Jake, Reinvented	0	1	0	1
Autobiography of My Dead Brother	0	1	0	1
The Dancers	1	0	0	1
Hole in my Life	0	1	0	1



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Malcolm X	1	0	0	1
Rumble Fish	1	0	0	1
My Name is Asher Lev	0	0	1	1
Death Be Not Proud	0	0	1	1
Lupita Manana	1	0	0	1
The Good Earth	0	1	0	1
The Color of Water	0	0	1	1
Devil in the White City	0	0	1	1
The Scarlett Pimpernel	0	1	0	1
The Glory Field	1	0	0	1
The Hunger Games	0	1	0	1
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer	1	0	0	1

**Appendix H: Titles or Authors of Short Stories, Poems, and Non-Fiction Assigned****Q9: Major Short Story Authors Assigned 15 or More Times**

Major Short Story Authors Assigned	N	Percent of Total Number of Courses (N=784)
Irving	82	14.3%
Poe	394	68.8%
Bierce	53	9.2%
London	54	9.4%
Twain	150	26.2%
Harte	35	6.1%
Chopin	69	12.0%
Faulkner	95	16.6%
Porter	23	4.0%
Fitzgerald	37	6.5%
Hemingway	72	12.6%
O'Brien	23	4.0%
Bradbury	108	18.8%
Crane	41	7.2%
Welty	32	5.6%
Jackson	24	4.2%
Hughes	39	6.8%
Cather	21	3.7%
Connell	113	19.7%
O. Henry	88	15.4%
Hawthorn	117	20.4%
Jacobs	47	8.2%
Walker	57	9.9%
Angelou	19	3.3%
Tan	69	12.0%
Finney	41	7.2%
Stockton	40	7.0%
Steinbeck	36	6.3%
Saki	73	12.7%
Thurber	50	8.7%
Maupassant	81	14.1%
Cisneros	23	4.0%

Capote	30	5.2%
Collier	16	2.8%
Benet	37	6.5%
Dahl	31	5.4%
Lessing	24	4.2%
O'Connor	32	5.6%
Hurst	56	9.8%
Achebe	17	3.0%
O'Flaherty	17	3.0%

**Q9: Major Short Story Authors Assigned 15 or More Times by Grade**

Short Story Authors Assigned					Total
		9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	
Irving	Count	2	9	71	82
Poe	Count	140	122	132	394
Bierce	Count	0	5	48	53
London	Count	9	6	39	54
Twain	Count	15	35	100	150
Harte	Count	0	5	30	35
Chopin	Count	0	15	54	69
Faulkner	Count	2	14	79	95
Porter	Count	0	4	19	23
Fitzgerald	Count	0	7	30	37
Hemingway	Count	4	13	55	72
O'Brien	Count	2	9	12	23
Bradbury	Count	25	77	5	107
Crane	Count	0	4	37	41
Welty	Count	0	1	31	32
Jackson	Count	5	8	11	24
Hughes	Count	36	1	2	39
Cather	Count	0	2	19	21
Connell	Count	110	2	1	113
O. Henry	Count	71	15	2	88
Hawthorne	Count	1	10	106	117
Jacobs	Count	2	43	1	46
Walker	Count	9	32	16	57
Angelou	Count	11	5	3	19
Tan	Count	26	36	7	69

Finney	Count	0	40	0	40
Stockton	Count	40	0	0	40
Steinbeck	Count	3	6	27	36
Saki	Count	50	23	0	73
Thurber	Count	29	12	9	50
Maupassant	Count	60	21	0	81
Cisneros	Count	5	9	9	23
Capote	Count	30	0	0	30
Collier	Count	14	2	0	16
Benet	Count	3	33	1	37
Dahl	Count	5	24	2	31
Lessing	Count	1	23	0	24
O'Connor	Count	0	8	24	32
Hurst	Count	56	0	0	56
Achebe	Count	0	17	0	17
O'Flaherty	Count	15	0	2	17
Total	Count	181	187	204	572

**Q10 A and B: Major Poets Assigned 15 or More Times**

Major Poets Assigned	N	Percent of Total Number of Courses (N=784)
Edgar Allan Poe	249	38.5%
Robert Frost	334	51.6%
Emily Dickinson	363	56.1%
Maya Angelou	91	14.1%
Homer	21	3.2%
Browning	39	6.0%
Shakespeare	216	33.4%
Wordsworth	75	11.6%
Tennyson	49	7.6%
Ee cummings	110	17.0%
Walt Whitman	176	27.2%
Langston Hughes	235	36.3%
Robert Burns	32	4.9%
Keats	39	6.0%
Bradstreet	44	6.8%
Sandburg	95	14.7%
Yeats	23	3.6%
Soto	17	2.6%

Gwendolyn Brooks	55	8.5%
TS Eliot	47	7.3%
Nicki Giovanni	25	3.9%
Longfellow	62	9.6%
Bryant	42	6.5%
Plath	38	5.9%
Roethke	35	5.4%
Emerson	30	4.6%
Pound	25	3.9%
Masters	21	3.2%
William Carlos Williams	43	6.6%
Dunbar	29	4.5%
Dorothy Parker	22	3.4%
Updike	33	5.1%
Millay	37	5.7%
Walker	40	6.2%
Nye	23	3.6%
Robinson	40	6.2%
Holmes	20	3.1%
Clifton	18	2.8%
Other Poets	567	87.6%

**Q10: Major Poets Assigned 15 or More Times by Grade**

Major Poets Assigned						Total
		9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	Mix of Grades	
Edgar Allan Poe	Count	80	73	96	0	249
Robert Frost	Count	98	115	119	2	334
Emily Dickinson	Count	108	99	156	0	363
Maya Angelou	Count	55	24	11	1	91
Homer	Count	19	1	1	0	21
Browning	Count	7	23	9	0	39
Shakespeare	Count	90	110	14	2	216
Wordsworth	Count	53	11	10	1	75
Tennyson	Count	26	23	0	0	49
ee cummings	Count	43	27	40	0	110
Walt Whitman	Count	33	13	130	0	176
Langston Hughes	Count	69	74	92	0	235
Robert Burns	Count	25	5	2	0	32
Keats	Count	10	25	4	0	39

Bradstreet	Count	1	1	42	0	44	
Sandburg	Count	38	37	20	0	95	
Yeats	Count	5	16	2	0	23	
Soto	Count	16	1	0	0	17	
Gwendolyn Brooks	Count	5	36	14	0	55	
T.S. Eliot	Count	5	3	39	0	47	
Nicki Giovanni	Count	19	2	4	0	25	
Longfellow	Count	3	5	54	0	62	
Bryant	Count	0	3	39	0	42	
Plath	Count	5	11	22	0	38	
Roethke	Count	16	11	8	0	35	
Emerson	Count	0	0	30	0	30	
Pound	Count	0	1	24	0	25	
Masters	Count	7	4	10	0	21	
William Carlos Williams	Count		1	20	22	0	43
Dunbar	Count		9	2	18	0	29
Dorothy Parker	Count		0	18	4	0	22
Updike	Count		2	28	3	0	33
Millay	Count		8	22	7	0	37
Walker	Count		33	7	0	0	40
Nye	Count		6	17	0	0	23
Robinson	Count		4	4	32	0	40
Holmes	Count		0	1	19	0	20
Clifton	Count		3	13	2	0	18
Other Poet	Count		138	251	175	3	567
Did not answer	Count		3261	3402	3061	144	9868
Total	Count		253	267	255	9	784

**Q21: Book-Length Works of Literary  
Non-Fiction Assigned 15 or More Times**

Book-Length Non-Fiction	N
Night	44
Tuesdays With Morrie	18
The Narrative of Frederick Douglas	30
Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin	17
Other	725
Do not assign book length non-fiction	181
No specific title mentioned	174

**Q22: Authors of Speeches and Essays Assigned 15 or More Times**

Speech/Essay Authors	N	Percent of Total Number of Courses
Mark Twain	20	3.2%
Ralph Waldo Emerson	73	11.8%
Henry David Thoreau	86	13.9%
Martin Luther King	241	38.9%
Abraham Lincoln	60	9.7%
Benjamin Franklin	62	10.0%
Thomas Jefferson	43	6.9%
Elie Wiesel	30	4.8%
Frederick Douglass	40	6.5%
Jonathan Edwards	25	4.0%
Patrick Henry	58	9.4%
Thomas Paine	31	5.0%
John F. Kennedy	30	4.8%
Sojourner Truth	22	3.6%
Other Authors	1413	228.3%

**Q22: Speech Authors by Grade Level**

Speech Authors	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	Mix of Grades	Total
Twain	10	6	4	0	20
Emerson	5	9	59	0	73
Thoreau	2	13	71	0	86
Martin Luther King	67	82	91	1	241
Abraham Lincoln	5	7	48	0	60
Benjamin Franklin	2	6	54	0	62
Thomas Jefferson	0	3	40	0	43
Elie Weisel	12	15	3	0	30
Frederick Douglass	2	4	34	0	40
Jonathan Edwards	0	2	23	0	25
Patrick Henry	0	8	50	0	58
Thomas Paine	0	2	29	0	31
John F Kennedy	13	5	12	0	30
Sojourner Truth	5	6	11	0	22
Other Author	482	496	434	1	1413
Total	253	267	255	9	784

## Appendix I: Informational or Technical Materials Mentioned

### A. General Materials

1. Textbooks/Workbooks/Brochures
2. Grammar handbooks/Manuals
3. Released exam items/Target tests
4. Catalogs/Graphs/Schedules/Business Forms/Maps
1. Newspapers/Magazines
2. Research paper references
3. Warranties/Recipes/Ads/Commercials
4. Consumer documents/Instructions

### B. Some Specific Materials

1. Space Academy Manual
2. The Foxfire Book
3. Arkansas Hunting Guide
4. On Dumpster Diving
5. *Poor Richard's Almanach*
6. Driver's Manual
7. Delta Farm Press
8. *The Daring Book for Girls* and *The Dangerous Book for Boys*
9. Commission of Meriwether Lewis
10. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*
11. The Declaration of Independence
12. *History of the Guitar*
13. Thomas Paine's *The Crisis No.1* essays
14. Emancipation Proclamation
15. Excerpts from *Freakonomics* and *Fast Food Nation*
16. Informational brochures about the local area